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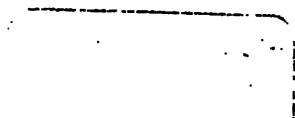
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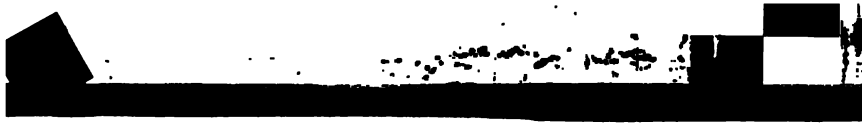
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ANILU SCIENTIA VERITAS









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CONTEMPORARY
FRENCH NOVELISTS

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AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION

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OCTAVE FEUILLET.





OCTAVE FEUILLET.

I.

To assert that Octave Feuillet's contemporaries were unjust to him seems at once a paradox and an impertinence. But there is a form of injustice which consists in exalting certain qualities in an author in order to refuse him certain others, and this they practised toward Feuillet.

A writer of supreme elegance, who carried tact, politeness, and the refinement of art, to their utmost limits, it was assumed that he must be wanting in vigor. Having natural elevation of mind, he held certain principles to be necessary in life, and cherished a faith in the ideal; hence it was inferred that his sense of the real must be deficient. Finally, because he was a marvellous story-teller, it was not thought possible that he could be at the same time a close observer and an analyst of a high order. This, I believe, is the opinion formed of Feuillet by some of his sincerest admirers, and it is not far removed from that of his worst detractors. For them alike, he is one

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of those attractive writers who is at the same time a man of the world; one endowed with sensibility and imagination, and whose only fault was that he yielded at times to passing literary fashions. They are grateful to him for having understood that the real object of literature is not to make us think, but to divert us. They have a taste for his novels, because they regard them as pretty stories without reality, well fitted to charm the leisure of well-bred people.

I should like, in retracing the literary likeness of Octave Feuillet, to preserve first that charm which is his most evident characteristic, but also to show that this novelist of the gay world was at the same time a man of open mind, interested in serious questions, sensitive to the influences of his time, greatly preoccupied by the conditions of modern society, and deeply concerned with the moral problems involved in the fatalities of our nature. It is this basis of solid thought by which Feuillet's work escapes the reproach of mere frivolity, and it is through this that it has a chance to live.

Like most of the writers who came into prominence about the middle of the century, Octave Feuillet belonged at first to the Romantic School. He was the collaborator of Dumas the elder, and of Paul Bocage. The first work of any consequence that he published under his own name,



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a short story entitled "Onesta" (1848), is that of a docile pupil of this school. The scene is the traditional Venice of romance; and on this stage we witness the dashing exploits of "a child of the century," a profusion of orgies, conspiracies, and duels, told in a ranting style; in short, nothing is lacking which a fervent admirer of Hugo and Musset had learnt from the books of his masters.

The scene of "Alix," his next story, is laid in Franconia, a realm as romantic as Venice; and it has for its principal characters a high-souled conspirator, a blasé tyrant, a waggish student, and a young girl driven mad by a guilty love. The following speech of the tyrant Ottocar, which ends the drama, gives the key to all the rest: "Bear away to the vaults of my chapel this corpse and this sleeping maiden; deposit them side by side, and wall up the door!"

"Redemption" is the story of a courtesan redeemed by love. The rehabilitation of the courtesan, the romance of conspiracy, the poetry of the orgy, these are the commonplaces of romanticism. This first fervor did not last long however. Feuillel soon turned against his masters. In "Le Village" he definitely takes his stand for the sanctities of home, of marriage, and the domestic hearth. "Dalila" is a refutation of the famous theory which makes a disorderly life the inevi-

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table accompaniment of genius. In most of his "Proverbs" he pronounces in favor of every-day morality, of decency, and the domestic virtues. But his zeal is not always discreet. These polished works are not exempt from bourgeois sentimentality; the author preaches and moralizes. We feel that he has broken with the ideas of romanticism rather than disengaged himself from them.

To take up arms against a theory is to show that one is not quite independent of it, so Feuillet never entirely severed his first literary ties; throughout his works he was a dissenter from the Romantic School and yet a Romantic. From another point of view, his "Proverbs" is a work of little originality. Neither the form nor the setting properly belongs to Feuillet; they abound in reminiscent touches, and we constantly receive an impression of something "already read." The epigram that has been fathered upon Jules de Goncourt calling Feuillet the "family Musset" is spiteful but not unjust.

The Feuillet of the "Proverbs" is a Musset without the winged fancy, the frolicsome youth, the deep and tender melancholy, — a Musset grown ponderous. I am therefore not inclined to accord to the "Proverbs" the rank usually assigned them among his productions. I can see in them only a preparatory work, in which the author tries

his hand at sprightly conversation and the development of moral themes.

I pass over "Bellah," a tale of the Vendéan Insurrection. With "The Little Countess"¹ begins that series of romantic society novels which are Feuillet's special province. This story and the two that follow it, "The Romance of a Poor Young Man"² and "Sibylle,"³ belong to his first and perhaps most characteristic manner. It is certainly his most charming manner, and many of his readers cannot forgive him for having abandoned it.

Urbanity of tone, noble sentiments, an optimistic view of human nature, combine to make them precious specimens of what we are tempted to-day to call the insipid style, but which it would be more just to call the temperate style. Its charm consists in a sort of exquisite harmony of half-tints. In this sense it is not too much to say that "The Romance of a Poor Young Man" is the *chef-d'œuvre* of its kind.

Humanity may be growing old, but she still delights in a fairy tale. "Cinderella" and "The Sleeping Beauty" are stories that can be constantly retold, on condition of slightly altering the scenery and costumes.

This is what Feuillet knew how to do, mingling

¹ "La Petite Comtesse" (1856).

² "Le Roman d'un jeune homme pauvre" (1858).

³ "L'Histoire de Sibylle" (1862).

with subtle art elements borrowed from the most diverse sources and *even* from reality. Maxime Odiot is a prince in disguise, — “handsome, well-made, skilled in all exercises of body and mind,” like the heroes of Perrault’s fairy stories. He has for witnesses of his exploits those old Breton forests which beheld the heroes of the early tales of chivalry ride through their shades. And these heroes may be counted among Maxime’s ancestors; he is not an isolated figure amid the creations of our literature; he carries on a tradition. That is why this aristocratic hero has become, in a certain sense, a popular hero. His name has reached even the illiterate. They still point out the window in the Tower of Elven from which Maxime made his perilous leap. His adventures have become part of the common inheritance of French imagination.

In our opinion, “M. de Camors” and “Julia de Trécœur,” composed on quite a different system, mark Feuillet’s period of fullest maturity. It was J. J. Weiss who reproached Feuillet with letting himself be disturbed by the success of brutal literature, and making concessions to a style of writing which was not his; introducing into his books, in imitation of the Realists, violences which are the more shocking from their incongruity. We think, on the contrary, that the influence of realism, incontestable as it is in all Feuillet’s work, starting

from "M. de Camors," was a salutary influence. It helped to renew his talent, and withdrew him from a style of composition that threatened to become insipid; above all, it forced him to develop all that was strongest, deepest, and most solid in his own originality. These two books are manifestly from the same hand as those that preceded them: Feuillet remains himself. But he applies to them a more virile conception of art; he understands at last that the most beautiful dreams are of less worth than a picture of life as it really is.

When "M. de Camors" appeared, his contemporaries looked upon it first of all as a novel with a key, founded on actual life, and full of personalities. We know how transitory this sort of interest is. It has completely died out to-day, and we do not regret it. "M. de Camors" is for us only a general type, and we are especially grateful to Feuillet for having essayed in his time an enterprise that has so often tempted the ambition of writers desirous of estimating at its true worth the high society of their time.

In his opening scene, where the ragpicker boxes M. de Camors's ears, a scene visibly modelled on that of Don Juan and the beggar, Feuillet calls our attention to the kinship between his hero and that of Molière. In fact, the hero, who was defined in the 17th century as the fine gentleman scoundrel (*grand seigneur méchant homme*), he whose por-

trait the novelists of to-day are forever repainting as the dilettante, is the same whom Feuillet depicts as the freethinker of the Second Empire. "Montjoie" is a first sketch for him. Camors is the finished type that will endure.

An illusion, to which exceptional minds are always liable, is that they are exempted by the superiority of their intelligence and their rank from bowing to the laws that other men obey. This illusion betrays itself under various guises, but it is as eternal as the pride that gives it birth. What form does this foible assume under certain conditions? What are its inevitable consequences? These are the questions which Feuillet has considered in portraying for us the gradual downfall of M. de Camors. He has been careful, moreover, not to calumniate his personage. He has preserved his attractive exterior and his grand manner, not wishing to produce a stilted moral-tale, but a work of truth. For this reason it will be impossible in future to write the history of the evolution of the aristocratic freethinker without giving a leading place to M. de Camors.

A study of manners demands a large setting for its proper display. "Julia de Trécœur" is a tale of sudden, blasting passion; and accordingly the narrative is rapid, concise, concentrated, the touch is sober and sure. In this intense and high-pitched drama, a hint enables us to understand or divine

everything. This remarkable book recalls the most daring creations of art.

In our day a singularly false idea prevails in regard to boldness in art. An author who has affronted the scruples of good taste, applauds himself on his audacity ; he ought rather to reproach himself for awkwardness and a heavy hand. Art consists in knowing how to say everything so that it shall be accepted. It is thus that in painting a criminal passion, Feuillet has produced a picture which is not indeed chaste, which is even the reverse, but remains, after all, decent.

Never had Feuillet shown more nervous vigor of style and talent than in "Julia de Trécœur;" nevertheless, this book inaugurates a last manner in which there is an undeniable falling-off. In his latest novels a certain weariness betrays itself by many signs, such as excessive rapidity in the narrative, something hurried and summary in the execution; situations already dealt with are taken up again, familiar figures reappear, the touch is no longer so discreet, the tones offend by their violent contrast, there is an evident straining after effect.

In "A Marriage in High Life"¹ the design is vague and uncertain; "The Love Affairs of Philippe"² is perhaps the least interesting of Feuillet's

¹ "Un Mariage dans le Monde" (1875).

² "Les Amours de Philippe" (1877).

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stories; "A Woman's Diary"¹ is a case of special pleading; "La Parisienne" and "La Veuve" are full of melodramatic effects; "La Morte" is the story of Sibylle retold, but more soberly. "An Artist's Honor," which dates from the last year of the master's life, seems made up of reminiscences of his former books; and yet Feuillet was so richly endowed with the novelist's most precious gifts, that even in his tired old age he still put to shame the most skilful of his younger contemporaries.

II.

What Feuillet wished to be, was the novelist of aristocratic society. Only those had the honors of this pen, who could show a sufficient number of quarterings, and trace back to the purest old French stock, such as Maxime Odier, Marquis de Champey d'Hauterive, Louis Lange d'Ardennes de Camors, Charlotte de Campvallou d'Arminges, born de Luc d'Estrelles, etc. Feuillet has made only one exception, in the person of the painter Fabrice. But, as we all know, the profession of an artist is no derogation. These noble personages have occupations suitable to their rank, the first and most habitual being to do nothing. They can, however, be soldiers or diplomats without loss of dignity; they can also conduct researches among

¹ "Le Journal d'une Femme" (1878).

historical archives, restore ruined abbeys, copy miniatures out of old missals, and, in short, do anything which can be done without having learned it. They are trained in all athletic sports; and it has often been remarked what an important place Feuillelet accords to horsemanship in his novels; this is because the horse is a *noble* animal. Feuillelet's heroes live and die on horseback.

Are they rich, those heroes? At the very best they have been rich, or ought to be so; for they are by birth and instinct, "choice and luxurious beings."

The manners of the aristocracy have often been described. We all know the attraction such descriptions have for a certain class of readers, not always the most select. In consequence, the feuilleton novel is always full of dukes and princes, to whom the author lends those traits which the readers of feuilleton fiction attribute to dukes and princes. Balzac has his *marquises* who might easily be mistaken for dressmakers, and Dumas the younger has his portraits of society women sketched in the demi-monde. There is another error, which the painter of the great world seldom escapes, and that is, betraying in presence of all this elegance, the amazement of the small bourgeois. There are, in short, twenty ways of failing to depict high society. There is but one way to succeed, and it is found only in the novels of

the one Feuillet. His gentlemen have really the manners and bearing of the class to which they belong. They put in practice the maxims and usages peculiar to that class, and conform to them without effort; as, indeed, they do not suspect the existence of any other usages; they are simply breathing their native air.

But beyond the outer appearance and the costume, there is the soul itself that must be reached. Fashions of thought and feeling are modified by the social caste; and the higher it rises in the scale, the greater is the distance from natural and instinctive modes of life.

As Feuillet justly remarks: "Society life has this detestable quality, that it creates fictitious characters and passions, delicate situations and imperceptible shades of feeling which strangely complicate the practice of duty, and obscure the right path which should be so plain and easy to recognize." It is there that respect for the opinion of others outweighs self-respect, that scruples about the punctilio of honor disguise the true idea of honor, and duty is powerless against convention. These "choice and luxurious" beings are usually the slaves of pride and vanity. Feuillet has excelled in their special psychology. He knows well how to describe those sentiments that are doubtless false from the natural point of view, but yet are real sentiments in a certain social sphere. For

all these reasons, Feuillet's characters belong truly to the great world ; they are distinguished, to the core, with that innate distinction which comes from inherited tendencies, from treasured traditions, from examples constantly observed, a distinction which is in their blood and in the air they breathe.

It is natural therefore to ask ourselves what the picture is which so credible a witness has drawn of the aristocracy of his time.

"The novelist knows that he has no right to slander his period," writes the author of "M. de Camors;" "but he has the right to paint it as he sees it, or he has no rights at all. As to his duty, he thinks that he knows it: that duty is, while painting the most delicate moral situations, to keep his judgment severe, and his pen chaste."

Perhaps this severity of judgment on the part of Feuillet has not been sufficiently noticed ; it has been disguised by the chaste elegance of his pen. The people of quality who have adopted Feuillet as their novelist, who have made use of his name, and have more than once held up his books in opposition to those of another school, have not perceived that these books contain many a severe lesson addressed to themselves which, by their approval of his writings, they seem to sanction.

Certainly Feuillet has never denied that many fine examples of virtue are to be met with in the higher circles of society in his day. He leaves to

others those wholesale denunciations into which there enters even more of silliness than of injustice. He has many times brought on the scene men who are types of loyalty; thoughtful and devout young girls; discreet fine ladies. It is even an habitual proceeding with him, whenever he shows us one of his perverse types of womanhood, to oppose to her the gentle figure of a sincerely loving, resigned, Christian woman. There are, among these latter, some exquisite beings. Recall, for instance, the delicious group of Madame de Télec and her daughter, the future Madame de Camors, who, even after marriage has matured her by its harsh ordeal, still retains naturally her childish pet name of "Miss Mary," such is the freshness and grace she keeps, in spite of an aching heart.

Nevertheless, the impression left by the ensemble of Feuillet's works remains one of profound unrest and inevitable decadence. It belongs to the moralist to point out the causes of this unrest. Two of these causes Feuillet has indicated, and he reverts to them persistently. The first is the loss of religious faith by a society which clings to its semblance, and keeps up its outward observances. Feuillet has noted the prevailing forms of fashionable devotion.

Certain persons — women especially — have preserved a sort of literal belief, a genuine faith, although quite unrelated to action, and without

influence on their conduct. With a still greater number, devotion is merely conventional, and allied to absolute scepticism. It is a matter of fashion, a means of distinguishing themselves from low-bred persons.

This ceremonial piety furnishes many rallying signs by which the members of a certain class can recognize each other, but it no longer affords the least moral influence over the soul. It has ceased to be the foundation upon which all reposes.

What, then, can society rest upon? If it no longer believes in any principle above and beyond itself, may it not find one within itself? May not honor, that highest expression of the social relations, become the religion of an irreligious society? Feuillel maintained to the end, as his last books prove, his attachment to this principle. He believed that it should be upheld and exalted against the invasion of the doctrine of egoism. But is honor a sufficient principle of action, and one that can take the place of all others? The whole question is there. Feuillel believed so at first, but not for long. A page of "The Poor Young Man" testifies to his early confidence in the efficacy of the principle of honor:

"I have always thought that in modern life, honor rules the whole hierarchy of duties. It supplies the place, in our day, of so many half-effaced virtues and slumbering beliefs; it plays

such a tutelary *rôle* in our society, that it would never enter my mind to weaken its rights or lessen its obligations. Honor, in its undefined character, is something superior to law and morality. It is not to be reasoned about, it must be felt. It is a religion. If we no longer keep the 'folly of the cross,' let us keep the sublime folly of honor!"

And yet it was actually as a protest against this doctrine, — to show how dangerous and delusive it is, — that Feuillet, several years later, wrote "M. de Camors."

To despise men, yet to preserve one's self-esteem, to reject the laws of vulgar morality, yet to permit oneself nothing base, such are the maxims of practical philosophy which M. de Camors reads in that last will and testament wherein his father sums up for his benefit the experience gathered from life. To the execution of this programme, M. de Camors brought exceptional gifts, a naturally lofty spirit, a keen intelligence, and the happy confidence of the man born under a lucky star; and yet the persistent application of these maxims had resulted in utter bankruptcy. While tramping under foot all those moral beliefs that restrain the vulgar, he had reserved honor as an impassable barrier, but under the empire of passion he had come to ask himself whether, after all, honor were not as conventional as all the rest, and he had overridden that too; but beyond it, he had encountered crime,

had touched it with his hand, then horror seized him and he recoiled.

Such is the final term of the analysis. Not only does honor fail to supply the place of all other principles, but it is not sufficient unto itself. We fail in this last virtue through having been faithful to it alone; and as it escapes us too, we repent our trust in it.

Feuillet adds: "I fancy that honor apart from morality is worth little, and that morality apart from religion is worth nothing. All these form a chain, honor hanging like a flower from the last link; but if the chain is broken, the flower falls with the rest."

This idea, that virtue is frail if not upheld by religion, has so often been expounded by Christian moralists that it sounds like a truism; but it is not so from the pen of a society novelist. The society to which it refers is peculiarly situated, remaining, as it does, ostensibly attached to a religion whose spirit no longer sways it, and being thus prevented from welcoming other beliefs as substitutes for its original faith. The ruins of the old ideal obstruct the road, and cut off all access to the new. It is thus condemned to complete moral nihilism, and this is fatal. There are doubtless many excellent people outside the pale of Christianity; a materialist is not necessarily a rascal, nor does an atheist inevitably dispense with practical morality.

Feuillet is well aware of this ; and he has presented Louis Ganderax in "Sibylle," and Dr. Talle-vaut in "La Morte," as worthy of the highest esteem.

But what is impossible is, that a society should remain virtuous which is at once outwardly Christian and sceptical at heart. This duplicity, this fundamental hypocrisy, must be destructive of all true morality.

Another cause of moral decline, connected with the first, is that the institution upon which society is based — the institution of marriage — is out of joint. There is hardly a novel of Feuillet's in which he has not shown us one of those fashionable couples who live on a footing of amicable divorce.

One of the characters in "A Marriage in High Life" passes in review the guests assembled in a certain salon. He points out, at hap-hazard, seven or eight couples, every one of whom is living in a state of flagrant incompatibility and disunion. "He draws the conclusion that there must exist in our civilization, especially in the higher social circles, certain general causes which corrupt marriage at its source, and deposit within it fatal germs."

Among these general causes we might point out several without fear of going far astray, such as the levity with which most marriages are contracted,

the almost exclusive concern for the material interests involved, the shallow conception that most men form of their duties, the frivolity of many women, the coarseness and clumsiness which seem to be common attributes of the male sex.

But the deepest cause is that young men and young girls, formed as they are, at the moment of coming together, by the years they have already lived, are destined never to understand each other, and find a real union impossible.

As a result, one of two things happens. Either the young girl, being born with bad instincts, has them further ripened and developed by the experience of life; or, as is often the case, the girl is truly pure in soul, and has been prepared by a wise education to become a worthy woman. It is then that the irremediable discord breaks out to sever her from a husband of sceptical mind and withered heart, with the morals of a libertine.

Every mother must know this, who has had the virtue to train her daughter, to refine, purify, and spiritualize her natural instincts: "Such a mother must say to herself that a young girl so trained, so perfect, is separated from the average man who treads our streets, or even our salons, by an intellectual and moral abyss as wide as that which separates her from a negro of Zululand."

It is easy to divine the disasters liable to follow, and to spread from the family to society.

It is only justice to add that this dark picture applies only to a narrow circle of Parisian society. Feuillet is one of those who believe that the atmosphere of the provinces has a sort of preservative quality, that the mind remains sounder and saner there, that a more natural spirit prevails, and traditions and beliefs keep all their sacred meaning.

He has drawn pictures of a truly patriarchal existence in the châteaux of Brittany and Normandy. The same contrast is brought out in the plays of one of the most penetrating observers of the society of the same period, Émile Augier.

The fine old provincial gentlemen of the one, the Férias, the La Roche-Ermels, are companion-pieces to the Puymarins and Thommerays of the other. Both have spoken in the same tone of the demoralizing effect of Parisian life, whose contagion has been repeatedly denounced by Augier, and in which Feuillet sees "the letting loose of the seven deadly sins."

Feuillet is especially concerned with the results of this influence on the feminine mind. He leaves aside "those shallow fools who take Parisian life only on its petty side and in its puerile dissipations, who pay visits, make rendezvous, bustle about, dress, gossip, flutter night and day amidst their busy nothings, and dance in a sort of frenzy in the rays of the Parisian sun, without thoughts, without passions, without virtues, and almost without vices."

He contents himself with the passing remark that "it is impossible to imagine any creatures more contemptible."

He concerns himself only with the *élite*, with those who think, read, and dream; and he shows us how, in that atmosphere, they become pure pagans. Here is a full-length portrait of one such woman.

"The true, pure-blooded Parisienne, in her full flower, is an extraordinary being. In this strange hot-house of Paris the child soon becomes a young girl, the young girl a woman, the woman a monster, a charming, formidable monster. Often chaste in body, her mind is profoundly polished and corrupted. In the great whirl of Parisian life, in its salons, its theatres, its exhibitions of every kind, she has seen all countries and all ages pass before her eyes and before her mind. She knows their manners, their passions, their virtues, and vices, revealed and poetized by art in every form; and all this ferments day and night in her over-heated brain. She has seen everything, guessed everything, imagined everything, and coveted everything. She is at the same time curious about all things and weary of all things. She conducts herself sometimes well, sometimes ill, without great taste for either good or evil, because she dreams of something better than the good and worse than the evil. Her innocence is often separated from vice

only by a caprice and from crime by an opportunity."

And Feuillet has pleased himself several times by creating the caprice and the opportunity. This Parisienne of the disordered brain may be different from the tranquilly immoral Parisienne of M. Becque, but she is quite as worthless. The most advanced naturalism has never dealt with her more cruelly.

Let us notice finally that Feuillet, who wrote during a long period of over forty years, had before his eyes at least two distinct societies, that of the Second Empire, and that of the Third Republic.

But they did not appear to him essentially different, and he considers them under the same aspect. We perceive, however, in his last books, certain touches that were wanting to the preceding ones. It is in them that we hear young girls using language "which would cause an ape to blush."

The last shreds of decorum and good-breeding, a certain glaze of politeness and elegance that still lingered, are fast disappearing. Cosmopolitanism has invaded French society, and destroyed its true character. It is a society that is becoming disintegrated, a world that is vanishing away.

III.

We have seen under what aspects Feuillet has represented the society of his time ; it remains for us to point out what was his conception of life, and what sentiments he best knew how to paint.

“I was born romantic,” says one of his heroes. All of them might say the same ; there is a family likeness among them in this respect, and it is easy to guess from whom they inherit it. A romantic turn of imagination is indeed Feuillet’s distinguishing trait. Under what guise life appears to romantic natures, how they bear themselves through it, what joys and sufferings are peculiar to them, and finally, whether they have reason to rejoice or lament over the sort of privilege granted them at their birth, — all this may be learnt from the novels of Feuillet better than elsewhere.

We all know well enough what the romantic spirit is, for specimens of it are not rare. One can easily count up the women who are not romantic ; and many, even among us men, need the rude lessons of life to strip them entirely of a tendency of mind more common than might be supposed.

Sibylle, when a very little girl, wished to ride on a swan, and hold a star in her childish hand. Who has not been like her ?

But a confusion of ideas helps to obscure our definition of the romantic. For on the one hand romantic natures, being full of self-love, voluntarily confound their day-dreams with the ideal conceptions of poetry; while those, on the other hand, whose nature is vulgar, are pleased to degrade poetry and the ideal by confounding them with the merely romantic, in a common contempt.

In truth, nothing is more opposed than the romantic and the poetic. Poetry is not exclusive of reason, nor the poetic necessarily in opposition to the real. Poetry appears in things that seem least to admit of it, as soon as we penetrate their real meaning, and comprehend their depths. There is poetry in the humblest and most monotonous existences; there is poetry in the accomplishment of the homeliest duties, in the practice of the most commonplace virtues; poetry consists in going to the bottom of that which is.

Romance is the opposite tendency. It is the taste for the extraordinary; it is also impatience in supporting the yoke of reality, a longing to forsake the trodden paths, a belief that happiness exists only outside of established rules, and that life is not worth living except in those fiery moments which break up its monotony and platitude. The imagination in revolt against reason escapes toward the rare, the exceptional, the difficult, the impossible.

Romance mingles with all the sentiments to modify them, and give them a hue of its own. It blends with the religious sentiment, and is called mysticism. It unites itself with virtue; it is not rare for those incapable of the customary virtues and small sacrifices of every day, to find themselves, under its stimulus, rising to the height of the most difficult situations and ready for acts of heroic devotion.

Above all, romance shows itself in the affections. A romantic woman loves neither her lover, nor her husband, nor her children like any other woman.

The romantic spirit leads men to seek out delicate and perilous situations. It has often been questioned whether friendship can exist between two persons of opposite sex, without a trace of the more tender sentiment entering in. It is this doubt that makes intellectual sympathy with a woman so enticing to men upon whom the realities of the more ardent passion have begun to pall. This is what makes married women devoted to their duties, unable to resist the charm of these guiltily irreproachable relations.

I notice in Feuille's novels several situations of this kind. In "A Marriage in High Life" M. de Kevern constitutes himself the spiritual director of the woman he loves, and uses the influence he derives from a mutual attachment to reconcile her

to her husband. The writer of "A Woman's Diary" makes herself the good angel of a man whom she had wished to marry. In "The Parisienne," Jacques de Lerme carries on the most platonic of love affairs with an unhappily wedded wife; now, platonism is simply the romantic version of love.

It is the spirit of romance again, that lends to certain situations a charm not their own. Poverty, for instance, is in itself a merely painful and morose condition, and has, besides, the peculiarly distressing power of reaching the very heart, humiliating and lowering the character, dulling the delicacy as well as the pride. It is nevertheless true that certain natures are refined by poverty, and find a bitter joy in the struggle perpetually forced upon them to defend their dignity against themselves as well as others.

Thus Maxime Odier, being romantic, finds a satisfaction in the position of a poor young man which he would never have suspected as the Marquis de Champcey d'Hauterive, the tranquil possessor of hereditary millions.

There is something morbid in romance; for it brings us into conflict with the implacable order of things—an unequal conflict in which we exhaust ourselves, and which leaves us at last no resource but to seek refuge in death, driven thereto by disgust, indignation, and defiance. It

is easier, after all, to choose death than to remake our lives.

Thus we find romantic souls often haunted by the idea of death; they take a morbid pleasure in planning touching and magnificent obsequies for themselves, at which they are present in imagination, and experience the shudder and the tears.

Cécile, in "A Woman's Diary," goes out in her white ball-dress into the snowy night, to lie down and bury herself in a spot she has chosen for the sake of its tender memories. "What a scene," says the author; "that desolate nature, the girl so lovely in her festal array. She had worn it, I have always thought, from a feeling of strange coquetry, to bring her death into harmony with her life, and also, no doubt, that the last image of her might remain more touching and gracious, more worthy of pity."

This is a just observation. Such an impulse, absurd as it may seem, is perfectly in accordance with the romantic spirit.

This is why there is a fine assortment of fantastic deaths and strange suicides in Feuillet's novels; forming, as it were, a repertory of elegant ways that may be resorted to for quitting this world.

There is the little Countess, mounting her horse one evening, — in her ball-dress naturally, — and riding out, under a pouring rain, in order that she

may die beside the man whom she had learned to love on perceiving that he disdained her.

There is Sibylle, dying after a walk under the treacherous rays of the moon, on the arm of the man without whom or with whom she cannot live.

Then we have Julia throwing herself on horseback from the summit of a cliff; Maurice de Frémeuse, in "La Veuve," killing himself at the foot of the cross, where he had sworn eternal fidelity to the friend whose memory he has betrayed; and finally the artist Fabrice, taking his own life in compliance with the terms of a mad wager.

Feuillet has often been reproached for his mortuary fantasies, but they are only the natural conclusion to these romantic lives.

Romance is not the affair of vulgar souls who have never known the sense of being crushed and humiliated by life.

To dream of an ideal, even the most chimerical one, demands a certain nobility. It is a quality unallied to egotism and opposed to baseness. Now and then, with the aid of Heaven, it may even be the source of generous aspirations, and lead into right paths. On this ground, it may justly be defended in words like these:

"Heaven knows it is not against romantic ideas that this generation needs to be warned; the danger for the moment is not there. We are not

perishing from enthusiasm, but dying of the commonplace."

But if justice requires us to credit romance with all the generous elements it contains, we must still denounce the ruin it so constantly entails.

How often we see men with their eyes fixed on a far-off ideal and expectant of some impossible event, disdain the everyday virtues that demand too little effort, overlooking the simplest duties, and letting the happiness that is close beside them slip from their grasp. Such men lose their way in life; they dash themselves to pieces against the slightest obstacles.

Thus it is not rare to see mystics whose daily lives present a spectacle of disorder; and we as often behold long-cherished romantic aspirations ending in some vulgar catastrophe as devoid of love as of poetry.

This is the revenge of reality, dragging those who attempted to soar to dizzy heights far below the level of everyday morality.

"What a wretch I have become!" exclaims the heroine of "Julia de Tréceur." "No," they answer her, "but how unhappy!" Romance is the badge of unhappiness; the souls a prey to its influence are perpetually unsatisfied and disconsolate. They have asked from life what it cannot give; they have gone out to meet its inevitable disappointments. We can but pity them.

It is to Feuillet's credit, that, friend and advocate of romance though he is, he has neither ignored nor disguised its dangers. Nearly all his books have lugubrious or tragic endings. It is this that makes them true.

IV.

This tinge of romance has brought Feuillet's books into a sort of disfavor, and has prevented their full scope from being apparent. He has been regarded with suspicion as a painter of factitious sentiments; he has not been acknowledged as also a painter of simple, absolute passion; and yet love reigns in his work, and reigns as master there. It is real love, passionate love, such as goes straight to its end, in spite of everything, strewing its path with treachery, grief, and despair.

There is not one of these books that fails to show us its march, sure, direct, irresistible. We all know the kinship between love and hate, but ordinarily hate is made the conclusion of love. It is not rare to find it at the beginning.

Feuillet's lovers experience, at first, a sort of mutual repulsion and secret hostility, as if a presentiment warned them of all the woes they are to cause each other. The author multiplies barriers between them which seem well-nigh insuperable, — vows made beside a death-bed, the sacred duties of gratitude, and the like.

They themselves weave new obligations for their better protection. A frequent situation with Feuillet is that of a man, who, on the eve of becoming the lover of one woman, marries another, in order to bind himself by the tie of wedlock, and with the hope that the tenderness of a lawful affection may be a safeguard against his passion. But passion is the stronger; it breaks down the feeble obstacles the human will opposes to it.

Those who are destined to a mutual passion are invincibly impelled toward each other. Then comes the great catastrophe, sweeping away all those sentiments that make the dignity of human life.

“The word farewell was scarcely pronounced before they were in each other’s arms, forgetting earth and heaven, swept away by one of those whirlwinds of passion which annihilate in one instant a man’s honor and a woman’s virtue. . . . She knew at last how passion can falsify and pervert the purest and noblest souls, when once they have allowed it to enthrone itself as a sovereign on the ruins of the reason, the will, and the honor.”¹

The human beast, as M. Zola calls it, is then unchained. The crime of love, for which the world has so much indulgence, may serve as a stepping-stone to actual crime.

It is by this disquieting analysis of passion, this

¹ “Artist’s Honor” (“Honneur d’Artiste”), pp. 298, 336.

terror of the fatalities of the flesh, rather than by his attacks on the doctrines of materialism, that Feuillet shows the influence of Christianity.

In the same way Racine, the Jansenist poet, shows us in "Phèdre" the maleficent power of love. We cannot ask of poet or novelist that he should weaken the truth; what we may exact is that beneath their analysis of passion they shall show us the conclusions of morality.

The moral point of view is never absent from the pictures Feuillet paints of love. We may say as much of the portraits he has drawn of women, which we run the risk of misjudging if we leave this element out of account, modifying as it does the painter's vision.

Feuillet has a rich and varied gallery of women's portraits, nearly all of them having more relief and brilliancy than those of his men. Mothers and daughters, provincials and Parisians, the sound and disordered in mind, the virtuous and the criminal, angels and demons, I see scarcely a variety of the sex that he has not represented. Those, however, whom he has brought oftenest on the scene, and who are known as "Feuillet's women," are those fatal creatures, those enchantresses, of splendid beauty and strange perversity, Dalila, Charlotte de Campvallou, Sabine Tallevaut, and many others. It is interesting to study the process by which he presents to us a clear image of them.

Fervent admirer though he is of the art of the seventeenth century, he does not dream of borrowing from the portrait-painters of that period their abstract and intellectual style of treatment.

He tells us, for example, that Charlotte de Campvallou "was tall and fair, with deep-set eyes, overshadowed by the prominent arch of her almost black brows. The heavy masses of her hair framed a proud and melancholy face." But as the portrait goes on, he ceases to describe particular traits, the material details of the likeness; what he adds, instead of defining the image, makes it more vague: "Her dresses, of some soft woollen stuff, made by her own hands, draped her like an antique statue. Her cousins called her the goddess; this name, given her in irony, fitted her marvellously. When she walked she seemed to have stepped down from a pedestal; her head was small, like those of the Greek statues; her delicate nostrils seemed cut by the daintiest of chisels out of transparent ivory. She had the strange and somewhat savage air of one of Diana's nymphs."¹

It was a woman we had before our eyes; she has become a nymph, a goddess; the portrait turns to allegory. And though these goddess-women and sphinx-women may differ more or less one from another, they strike us rather by their general likeness. We suspect them of being copies from

¹ "M. de Camors," p. 64.

the same model, and this a model not seen but imagined by the artist. We feel that they could not walk among us, and breathe the same air as ourselves; their bodies are modelled upon too perfect lines, their souls are too remote from humanity. They do not belong to the world of the living; they are rather symbolic creatures; they personify the forces of perdition that reside in woman's beauty. It is through the medium of a moral idea, of a religious conception, that Feuillet sees the image of woman. He has thought to incarnate Eve and Delilah after his own manner. This is the being whom Christianity has raised from her abasement, but still combats, distrusts, and repels, — woman, through whom man fell.

v.

Feuillet's conception of art may perhaps be easily deduced from what has gone before; if not, he will himself aid us in discovering it.

“These thunderbolts of passion are no doubt exceptional,” he tells us somewhere; “but these exceptions are not rare; and it is enough that they exist, to justify the novel, which is the history of exceptional feelings, and to lend it the interest and dignity of truth.”

That is to say, the novel is first of all a work of the imagination. The novelist must invent

his personages, thus creating a world that offers many points of contact with ours, but remains, before all, his creation. He must also invent incidents, choosing such as are of a nature to interest us, and presenting them under the most thrilling forms.

Feuillet's novels are all dramas, with well-constructed plots and striking scenes. It may be that a novel should make us think, and give us food for reflection; but it need not be primarily an instructive work, and it should not be a work of science. Thus all pedantic display should be carefully eliminated.

There is pedantry in the prolixity and minuteness of analysis of our psychological novelists; they smell of the lamp, and suggest the instructor in mental philosophy.


There is a persistency in the enumerations of our descriptive novelists, and in the display of documents by our scientific novelists, which is in the worst possible taste.

Feuillet spares us the tedium of these long preliminaries; he gives us only the results of his analysis, and his descriptions are confined to a few lines; but he describes with a sure touch, he defines with the exact words; his language is always clear, his style swift and supple.

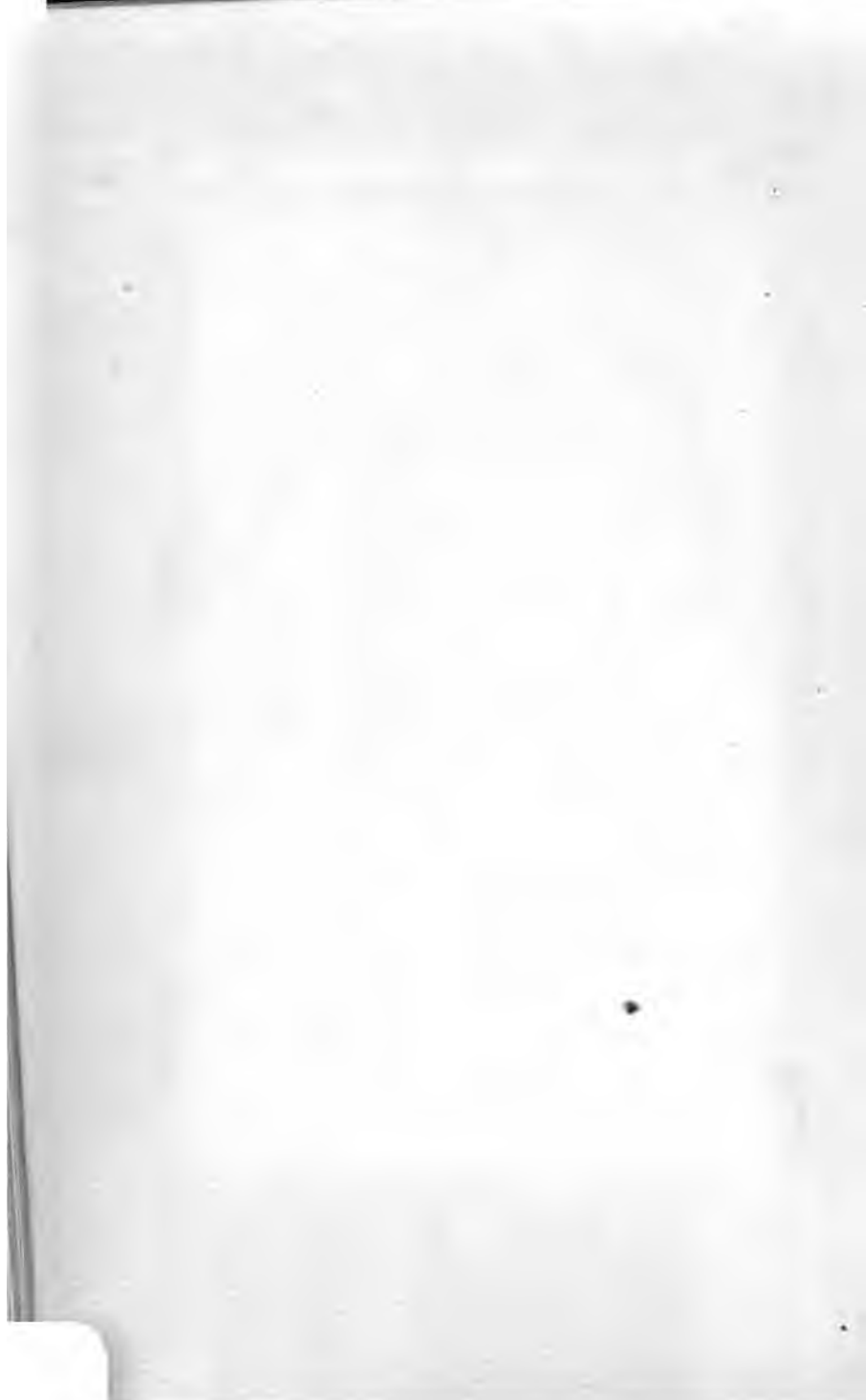
His choice of rare natures, whom he shows to us under the influence of exceptional sentiments,

and in the midst of startling events, is doubtless totally opposed to the method of the realists. We may prefer one system or the other, that does not matter; an author is responsible to us, not for the system he chooses, but for the use he makes of it.

Octave Feuillet has left behind him a work of real unity, in which all holds together, where the rarest qualities combine to produce a harmonious whole; a very individual work, whose originality is proved beyond doubt by the number of imitations and counterfeits it has brought forth,—a work wanting neither in observation, nor in fidelity to human nature, and having, above all, the charm of an incomparable distinction. It will remain the most perfect example of the idealist novel in our generation.



EDMOND AND JULES
DE GONCOURT.





EDMOND AND JULES
DE GONCOURT.

AMONG those whose trade is authorship, it is not rare to find the individuality swallowed up by the trade. Ideas, sensations, character — all are modified, altered, distorted, until literature seems to flow in the blood. The writer in whom this phenomenon has taken place has henceforth a psychology of his own. Accustomed to living a mimic life in a purely conventional world, he gets to seeing everything from the point of view of his art. He is outside of every-day humanity, and prides himself on being so. He proceeds to divide humanity into two categories, — authors and other men; unless he simplifies the classifications still further, and is content to distinguish between *himself* and other men. He becomes unsociable on system, and morose by habit; his self-love being so easily excited that it occasions him little pleasure and much torment. And for all this he deserves our pity.

He has no friends or kindred — only brother

authors, rivals, critics, and a public. He may be novelist or playwright, rhymist or chronicler, realist or idealist; he is no longer a man. The natural being has given place to the professional being; the man has been superseded by the man of letters, or, as they say nowadays, the *gendettre*.

The *gendettre* is one of the types of our day, a product of our social organism and our literary manners; and if future generations wish to study this type in its completest incarnation, they will find a perfect specimen in the Goncourt brothers.

I.

The descendants of Huot de Goncourt, advocate, and member of the Constituent Assembly, were small nobles, — the smallest of the small, but nobles all the same; and this is a circumstance that must not be overlooked. For, in truth, the de Goncourts were exempt from the vanity of the nobiliary particule, — a vanity that is, in fact, growing rare in our day, or at least is dissimulated by those who have it. But under another form more appropriate to modern manners, we find in them that exclusiveness which always takes the most acute form in the smallest lordling. It was this that impelled them to adopt a career which should distinguish them from the common herd,



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and set them above and apart from the crowd of functionaries, manufacturers, engineers, and soldiers, the commoners of a society in which the wits are kings. It was this instinct which confined their life to a narrow, pent-up world, remote from the vulgar crowd, — a world as jealous of its immunities and privileges as any caste under the old *régime*. As in the days when men wore the sword, there were country squires as well as great nobles, so in our black-coated society there are small squires of the pen.

The Goncourts had, besides, a small competence, sufficient to relieve them from adopting any trade which would have conflicted with their chosen vocation, yet not enough to tempt them to squander it away. Thus it was that literature became the sole mistress of their lives.

They sacrificed all to her, beginning with their individuality. For though it appears quite possible that there were marvellous affinities between the two brothers; that they were affected by the same things, had many sympathies and antipathies in common, and strange thought-transferences; nevertheless, in spite of these "mysterious ties," these "psychic bonds," the "linked atoms of their twin natures," the Goncourts were widely different in age and in character. They acknowledge this diversity of nature, and even attempt to analyze and define it.

We read in their *Journal*, under Jules de Goncourt's signature: "Edmond is of an impassioned and tender melancholy, while mine is the melancholy of a materialist. I feel in myself the nature of the eighteenth century abbé, with touches of the petty cruelty of a seventeenth century Italian; not blood-thirstiness or delight in the physical sufferings of others, but mere intellectual cruelty. Edmond, on the contrary, is almost foolishly good-natured. He was born in Lorraine, and is half a German. He dreams that in another age he might have been a perfect soldier, not averse to giving and receiving blows, and inclined to revery. I, on the other hand, am a Latin of Paris."

All this is certainly not very clear, and it seems as if it might have been expressed more simply. We can guess, however, what is meant by these involved statements, and they might be translated somewhat as follows: Jules the younger was witty, ironical, full of Parisian gayety, malicious and given to chaffing; Edmond was of somewhat heavier intellect. In the same way we get to distinguishing the part of each in their joint work.

It is stated in the "Zemganno Brothers,"¹ that Nello (Jules de Goncourt) was "the arranger, the finder of petty details, the adorer, who added flourishes to what his brother had invented as workable." We may translate this by saying that

¹ "Les Frères Zemganno," p. 197.

Edmond was the gentleman of theories, while Jules had the qualities of the performer and virtuoso. What they might have done separately, had each allowed his individuality free play, we cannot tell; but they themselves did not *wish* to know this. With them the individual is nothing; the work is everything. In view of this joint work, and in consideration of a higher interest, they each abdicated their own nature and renounced themselves.

They began by carefully eliminating all that customarily fills a man's life.

Having no family, they felt no desire to form such ties. On the contrary, they considered the "literary state" incompatible with the "married state." According to them, not only is it desirable that a literary artist should not marry, he has not even the right to marry; and when we see what a species of social monster and savage the true artist is, from their point of view, we no longer think of contradicting them. Against womankind in general they have all the suspicions and antipathies of the old bachelor. They despise as well as fear woman; for they see in her only a radically bad, unintelligent, and obstinate little being; a despot by nature, with a will-power which is all the more terrible from her being incapable of thought.

They are no more tender to the mistress than to the wife. The drama that they have put upon

the scene with the most complacency is that of the destruction of the artist in a man, killed by the stupidity and unconscious maleficence of a woman.

Therefore they were on their guard against allowing woman any empire over them. They gave to her neither a corner of their heart nor the smallest part in their existence. Feminine relations were for them a mere relaxation.

On the 2d of December, 1851, appeared the Goncourts' first book, entitled "En 18—." That day happened to be the date of a *coup d'état*. France was asking herself how she should receive the new government, while the Goncourts were concerning themselves as to how she would receive their new experiments in style.

This was a stroke of ill luck for them, but not entirely fortuitous. This variance between public thought and the thought of the Goncourts was destined to be lasting. Since that date there have been revolutions of all sorts, in government, in ideas, in morals; while the Goncourts have gone on their way making hitherto inconceivable combinations of words.

Not only were they devoid of all ambition, and with the good taste to aspire to no part in public affairs, but they were supremely indifferent to all such matters. Social questions, in a society that is transforming itself as rapidly and as profoundly as ours, interested them as little as political questions.

They had no taste for a society so *bourgeois* and tame as to have banished fancy, denounced extravagance, and suppressed the unexpected. Therefore they had no curiosity in regard to the problems on which that society's future depends; they ignored those problems, and lived outside of the atmosphere created by the modern conscience.

They are not known to have had a passion, not even a vice; but they had one small mania, — they were collectors.

It seems, however, that Jules de Goncourt only became a collector out of deference for the tastes of his senior; so that they had but one mania between the two. Nothing ever happened to these quiet frequenters of libraries and museums to distract them from their home-keeping habits. They were not travellers. The most they accomplished in that direction was a few short journeys to collect materials for a future volume. They were not society men, nor had they any love for the country. There was nothing in them resembling that enthusiasm for nature which prevailed among the writers of the first half of the century, and the landscape-painters who came later. They were absolutely without taste for natural scenery. Indeed, they deliberately wrote: "Nothing is less poetic than nature and natural things. We regard nature in the light of an enemy."

They note in themselves a disposition to "take

delight in the works of man and to be bored by the works of God."

And in fact, by a sort of inversion of the natural law, which is the very climax of the artificial and factitious, they only comprehend the works of God in proportion as they are interpreted and transmuted by man. In presence of nature they see nothing but a reminder of art. In a landscape they perceive strokes of the brush, outlines in red chalk, washes in India ink, bituminous tones, and water-color tints, as if it were nature that attempted to copy the processes of art.

It would be difficult, it must be admitted, to cut off all communication with men and things more completely.

The Goncourts held to the society of their fellow-beings only by an occasional reunion of artists and literary men in the *salon* of Princess Mathilde, at the hotel of the Païva, or at the Restaurant Magny. We know what conversation is reduced to among people of the same profession, and how it is forever returning by a natural instinct to the same subjects and to the same monotonous discussions.

The "Magnys," above all, occupied a great place in the Goncourts' life; their history is written on every page of the *Journal*. The Goncourts noted minutely all that they heard there; they wished no trace to be lost of the ideas agitated in

“one of the last surviving brotherhoods of true freedom of speech and of thought.”

To see them pause awe-struck before the talk of these diners-out, it would seem as if the interests of France and of humanity were all enclosed within the four walls of this restaurant. Yet on the other hand, it has been remarked that, if we were to trust the Goncourts' account, the conversations carried on in this “last brotherhood of freedom of speech” were all marked by one stamp, — that of extreme silliness. And this has caused astonishment; for the diners at Magny's were named Sainte-Beuve, Taine, Renan, Flaubert, Gautier, Saint-Victor. Judging from the poses in which they are presented to us, and from the words that flow from their lips, we should take them for a collection of idiots. Why is this? Take notice that the Goncourts have no intention of lowering them, no desire to hold them up to ridicule. These were the only men among their contemporaries whom the two brothers held in esteem, or for whom they felt the slightest sympathy. But they possess, as they somewhere boast, a wonderful gift for discovering mediocrity everywhere; they see everything on its small and shabby side. They have a judgment that permits them “to judge of a Pasquier by his inanity, a Thiers by his inadequacy, a Guizot by his hollow depth.” This judgment has allowed them to see

in Gautier chiefly the great eater, proud of consuming a jigot by the pound, and of winning five hundred at the game of quintain — a sort of phenomenon at a fair. In Saint-Victor they see only the man without opinions of his own, always the humble servant of a time-honored opinion. They distinguish two Sainte-Beuves: one, the Sainte-Beuve of private life, “becomes a small bourgeois, a sort of shopkeeper on a holiday, his intellect belittled by the prattle, the folly, the silly babble, of women.” But here is the other, the critic: “When I hear Sainte-Beuve with his little phrases touching upon a dead man’s reputation, I seem to see the ants invading a corpse; he scours away a fame in ten minutes, and leaves nothing of the illustrious gentleman but a clean skeleton.”

We recall the recent incident between Renan and Edmond de Goncourt, when M. Renan accused his interlocutor of not having understood him, and protested against an unintelligent stenography, which made him appear to have been in 1870–1871 a sort of secret agent of the Emperor William.

We could take up in this way, one by one, the portraits they have sketched in their *Journal*, and show how they have made caricatures of them all, without the least malice, and in perfect good faith. This is the result of a tendency from which a literary man can with difficulty free himself. — that

of seeing his brother writers only in relation to himself. He does not appreciate, he compares; and naturally enough the comparison is favorable to himself. Instinctively his attention is caught, and he is chiefly impressed by the faults and imperfections of others. In the life of the *généraliste*, "railing at a brother author," involuntary and unconscious though it may be, and without malice prepense, seems to be a necessity.

In a life reduced to such terms and so specialized, what is there left to fill the void? Issuing a new volume, and waiting for the notices of it, are the only possible events. In order to deceive themselves, and turn away their eyes from this nothingness, the Goncourts were continually repeating to each other that there is, in spite of everything, a sort of grandeur in such absolute devotion to the sole interests of art. But when it comes to that, carpentry is equally an art and equally monotonous. Accordingly it is hard to say whether more of nobility or of childishness enters into such a conception of life as theirs.

What is certain is, that a profound sadness emanates from it. "Men like us must ask themselves, when they come to the hour of death, Have we lived?"

It is the Goncourts who make this reflection, and with that bitterness which rises to a man's lips when he becomes aware of the emptiness of his own existence.

II.

The immediate result of this mode of life was that they lost their health. One of their characters somewhere remarks: "My dear fellow, I regard literature as a state of violence in which one can sustain one's self only by excessive efforts." They had recourse to every means to put themselves into this violent, excessive, and abnormal state; to keep up this excitement, this tension of the nerves, this fever and heat of the brain, which were for them the necessary conditions for producing a work of art. They remained alone for a certain number of days grappling with words, and came forth from these orgies of work in a condition of utter prostration. Their notions of hygiene were deplorable.

But nothing contributed more to this unhealthy condition of the nerves than the wounds inflicted on their self-love. For celebrity failed to reach them for many years, and indeed kept them waiting so long that one of the brothers lost heart and died before attaining it.

This tardy success is easily explained by what the Goncourts call somewhere the "close" atmosphere of their work. That work was destined to reach only a very restricted public, owing to its lack of general human interest.

The Goncourts were aristocrats in art as else-



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where. But, on the other hand, they loved applause, and could not well dispense with general approval. This is a not infrequent contradiction, but it has rarely caused more suffering than in their case.

We can follow day by day, in their *Journal*, the progressive effects of lassitude and discouragement.

“16th October, 1856. — Gray days, dark days, nothing but refusals and repulses, right and left, from high and low.”

“25th December. — Sold to Dentu for 300 francs our ‘Portraits from the 18th Century,’ two volumes, for the fabrication of which we bought from 2 to 3,000 francs’ worth of autograph letters.”

“11th June, 1857. — If the public knew at the cost of how many insults, outrages, and calumnies, of what discomfort of body and mind, a very small reputation is achieved, they would certainly pity rather than envy us.”

“10th March, 1860. — The truth is that our book, ‘Men of Letters,’ has met with a success of esteem, but has no sale. After ten years of labor, and the publication of fifteen volumes; after so many vigils, such conscientious perseverance; after achieving some success in our historical work, and in the novel which even our enemies acknowledge to have ‘masterly strength,’ — not a single gazette or review, great or small, has applied to us for contributions, and we begin to ask ourselves whether

we shall not be obliged to publish our next novel also at our own expense." Such are their litanies of ill-luck.

They impute the blame to everybody, including themselves. They accuse an indifferent public, hostile criticism, the disdain of the great newspapers for young writers, the ignoring of new names by the small newspapers, the vaudevilles that monopolize the theatres, the mediocrity that prevails everywhere. They speak with tears in their voice of that conspiracy of silence organized against those who wish to taste the sweets of publicity. They recapitulate the story of these days of waiting, of disappointment, of doubt, almost of remorse. They count up the hours, the many hours, that their hearts bled in obscurity. And such is the sincerity of their accent, so profound has been their suffering, so prolonged their martyrdom, that they attain to a sort of mournful eloquence whenever they describe, whether in their autobiography or their novels, but always with reference to themselves and from their own recollections, the anguish of the author's struggle against anonymity, that acute inward torture, with no spectator save the self-love that suffers and the heart that fails.

Then nervous disease set in with the Goncourts. This malady, to which our whole generation is more or less subject, took a peculiarly acute form with them. They became liable to a morbid sensitive-

ness that left them at the mercy of the slightest moral vexation, as well as of the least outward jar. They grew "so sensitive and thin-skinned that they seemed bereft of their outer integument, and were wounded and bleeding at the slightest touch."

Edmond at first appeared to be the chief sufferer; but later Jules became more affected, and it was actually of this disease that he died. ✓

This malady of the Goncourts is, in great part, as we may readily see, an acquired malady. Just as Baudelaire cultivated his hysteria, the Goncourts cultivated their nerves. They suffered from them, but they were proud of them; and they may be said to be among the number who enjoy bad health. They took pride in the sense of being peculiarly impressionable beings, "vibrating in a superior manner," so organized as to relish more keenly than others any delight, from a picture to the "broiled wing of a fowl." They regard this as the very source of their originality as writers; through it they seek to explain the nature of their work, its qualities and defects. They would apply to themselves the definition they have given of the talent of their Charles Demailly: "Charles possessed in a supreme degree the sensitive touch of the impressionist. He had an almost painfully acute perception of life and of all things. Inanimate objects, which

mean so little to most people, affected Charles vividly; they *spoke* to him as plainly as people. Furniture was friendly or inimical to him; an ugly wine-glass disgusted him with good wine: a shade, a form, the tint of a wall-paper, the stuff of a chair-cover, affected him agreeably or disagreeably. This nervous sensitiveness, this constant shock of impressions, most of them unpleasant ones, jarred on Charles's inward delicacy oftener than they caressed it, and made him a melancholy being. . . . Perhaps this was the cause also of his talent, of that nervous, rare, and exquisite gift of observation, always artistic, though unequal, coming as it did by fits and starts, and lacking that repose, that tranquillity of line, that abounding health, which characterize the truly great and beautiful work of art."

The Goncourts have, in short, the nervous temperament; that is their mark. Gautier was of plethoric habit. "It is feeding that wakes me up," he said. Flaubert, with his athletic build and enormous appetite, was a true son of Normandy. The Goncourts were the first "writers of nerves" — it is their chief pretension.

III.

Such was the Goncourts' experience of life, such their state of mind and body, when they

brought out the first of their books that counts, — “Charles Demailly.” We may therefore ask what qualities they were capable of putting into their work.

We notice, first of all, that they are totally destitute of anything resembling an idea. They admit that they are not among those who carry their work within themselves. They do not attempt to draw it out of their own depths, knowing beforehand that such an attempt would be vain. They have no title whatever to be considered moralists, not appearing, indeed, to know very clearly what the word signifies. They content themselves with remarking that any picture producing a moral impression is a bad picture, and they generalize further by applying the remark to literature. On other days, after they have been conversing with Gautier, they advance the theory of “the morality of the beautiful;” a theory that escapes the reproach of absurdity simply because it offers no appreciable meaning whatsoever.

It may be said, in short, that these are matters upon which they neglect to have opinions. It may be that, according to a definition of theirs, “the finest things in literature are those that make us dream of something beyond what they say;” but they themselves are writers who, having no beyond, can neither make us dream nor think.

They have no imagination. They are incapable

of painting anything they have not seen, or of describing any sensation they have not experienced, or at least heard related. From this point of view, it is curious to study their *Journal*, to find in it what gave birth to their books, and how these same books took shape.

The authors put into their novels all the humanity they found about them, from their grand-aunt and their second cousin to their housemaid. They put in all that they knew in the way of anecdotes, little stories, and general news. They lent to their characters their own little store of aphorisms. Their books are a collection of their memoranda.

They are likewise destitute of fancy, though they try their utmost for it, and take to themselves the credit somewhere of being "poets." Nothing can be more significant on this point than the project they formed of deliberately creating a school of modern fancy, revived from Marivaux, Beaumarchais, and Watteau.

"En 18 —" was their first unlucky venture in this direction; but they did not hold themselves sufficiently beaten. It was through fancy that they hoped to restore the stage. They dreamt of satirical farces, fairy pantomimes, dialogues in a winged language, which was to be the "spoken language of literature." This is what they attempted in the famous first act of "Henriette Maréchal," the act of the opera ball. There are

few examples extant of a more labored, elaborate, and less facile fancy, one, in short, into which so little fancy enters.

They have written books on history, and doubtless they speak with a little too much emphasis of their "historical works." They show more awe than is necessary over the pains they have taken in looking through "thirty thousand pamphlets and two thousand newspapers." This work of theirs has nevertheless its value. It has had a certain novelty, and it may still be read with interest and consulted with profit to-day. Its anecdotic worth and frivolous merit are incontestable. But let no one look in it for anything deeper or more solid. "History," they say, "can see no life in a period of which it does not retain a dress-pattern and a bill-of-fare." They have accordingly set to work to compose a history out of bills-of-fare and dress-patterns. They know nothing of Louis XV. but his mistresses, nothing of the Revolution but its stage-setting, nothing of the Directory save its fashions. They have made a history of costume and furniture. All this, we repeat, is not to be despised or neglected; but its interest is simply one of curiosity. What their "historical works" chiefly prove in regard to their quality of mind is that they could see nothing of society but its surface.

They have written works on the history of art;

and in contrast to nearly all æsthetes and art-critics, they were fitted for their work. They had begun by handling pencil and brush; they drew, sketched in water-colors, and etched, with ardor. Their feeling for art was very keen, and yet we know how limited was their horizon. They knew ancient art only through hearing it talked about by Saint-Victor, who himself hardly counts. Raphael gave them only the impression of paper-hangings badly painted. They are exclusively confined to the pretty mannerisms of eighteenth century art.

We see how, little by little, the field is narrowing. This literature, without ideas, without moral conceptions, destitute of imagination or fancy, ignoring the great currents of history and that slow evolution of social customs, a knowledge of which is a condition even of direct observation, as it enables us to penetrate below the surface of these social customs; such a literature must reduce itself to a mere copy of actual reality, caught in a momentary glance. The Goncourts are driven to the wall by modernism.

As is often the case, they make a law of art out of the special limitations of their own talent, and erect a theory upon the processes to which they are reduced.

“The modern is everything!” they declare; “the sensation, the intuition of the contemporary, of this spectacle that elbows you, of the *present*, in which

you feel the quiver of your own passions, of your very self; that is art."¹

This theory, taken in its largest sense, is not new, nor original with the Goncourts, nor is it confined to the art of our own period.

It expresses a general law, good for all times: that art cannot live, and has no reason for being, unless it brings us something new, a fresh interpretation of nature, a record of new shades of feeling. It is a law easily misunderstood, but not to be eluded; and those who have attempted to elude it have never succeeded. The most ardent partisans of tradition, the most submissive disciples of the ancients, the acknowledged representatives of Classicism, a Racine, a Boileau, were modern in their day as much as the Goncourts can be to-day, although with different methods.

A man can express only the ideas he has, can interpret only those sentiments in whose atmosphere he lives, can paint society and manners only from the models he has before his eyes. An art is modern, or it does not exist. But we fear that the Goncourts' theory takes modernity only in the most restricted sense, and that for them the modern means the external, the accidental, the exceptional, and the transitory in the life of their time.

Such is the complexity of the elements that make up a period, however, that every man may discover

¹ "Manette Salomon," p. 325.

in it what he wishes to see, and find what he seeks. Thus the question reverts to what the Goncourts were able to see in modern life, and what they succeeded in reproducing.

IV.

In the first place, they have painted its stage-setting. They loved their Paris even in its blemishes, and, in fact, especially for its blemishes. They left it to others to describe gay, brilliant, official, *show* Paris, the Paris of the boulevards, of the opulent quarters, as it appears on a *fête* day. They have confined their descriptions to the unfrequented and the ill-frequented quarters, the purlieus, the outer boulevards, and the suburbs; the bric-a-brac shops, newspaper offices, a studio interior, the wings of a theatre dimly lighted for a rehearsal, the wards of a hospital, the dance-halls of the barriers, vague shelters, houses of ill-repute, taverns, and ale-houses.

We could extract from their novels and their journal a complete collection of water-color views, representing the most hidden and obscure corners of Paris.

They have sketched, too, some of its most curious types of humanity, drawn chiefly from the literary and artistic world, among them many journalists, especially the petty journalists.

The editorial office of *Scandale* in "Charles Demailly" gives a fairly just idea of what has been called the Boulevard press. Florissac, Nachette, Couturat, Gagneur, are so many varieties of the literary Bohemian type. They have succeeded even better with the artistic Bohemian. Chassagnol and Anatole are figures drawn from the life, with a pencil that hits off reality closely.

Chassagnol is the theorizer, the orator, whose eloquence is kindled at the hour of absinthe, the talker with vaguely intolerant views, equally outraged by the Academy of Rome, by the Art School, and by the Institute — the æsthete, whose brain is perpetually seething with formulas for the art of the future, who despises all talent save his own, and sneers at everybody's work; yet perpetually haunts the studios, where he pours out his impotent diatribes against the work of others, and his own unproductive glibness.

But it is Anatole, after all, who is the incarnation of the Bohemian artist — Anatole the *rapin*, victim of that fatal facility for art which leads him at an early age to scrawl caricatures of his masters on the margins of his school-books, and by enabling him later on to dispense with steady efforts, prevents his developing any real talent — Anatole, a virtuoso born of Humbug, who passes directly from the back shop of a small tradesman to the artist's studio — Anatole the *gamin*, the

good fellow and excellent comrade, with a supple mind, agile limbs, and exuberant gayety, the ring-leader in games, practical jokes, and buffoonery of all sorts — Anatole, the handy lad about a house, with a knack at caring for animals, amusing children, and affording the women the diversion of a harmless flirtation — Anatole, the being without existence of his own, or the full possession of his own individuality, accommodating himself to any surroundings, attaching himself to others like a natural parasite — Anatole, who, in the spirit of good-fellowship habitual with him, shares successively the bed of a circus-rider, the studio of a noted artist, and the box of a policeman — Anatole, tossed about high and low, one day enjoying all the luxuries of existence, such as a full flask of rum and a package of ten-cent tobacco, the next, descending to the meanest jobs, to nameless trades, such as painting apothecaries' signs and coloring anatomical models — a poor devil without bitterness or hatred in his heart, who awakes one morning to the consciousness of that most lugubrious of fates, — the old age of a Bohemian.

Anatole would stand out among all the Goncourts' characters as the most amusing, the truest, and most touching, if the story of his misfortunes were not surpassed in truth and interest by that of the life, sufferings, and death of his friend and part-kinsman the little monkey Vermilion.

But what the Goncourts chiefly studied, after all, was the sort of nervous disorder whose phenomena they had observed in themselves, and which naturally attracted their attention in others. Their books are therefore full of descriptions of every sort of nervous affection, from the petty irritability of the author to serious and incurable maladies, and from the hysteria that causes most of the ills of the flesh to the religious ecstasies that end in madness. Renée Mauperin, the melancholy rattlepate; Sœur Philomène, the amorous sister; Barnier, the house-surgeon, haunted by the recollections of an operation performed by himself on a former mistress; Pierre-Charles, the base-born child; Germinie, — all are nervous sufferers.

The Goncourt novels are all constructed on the same plan, and all developed in accordance with the progress of some nervous malady. At first there is an atmosphere of calm, gayety, freedom from care, and the peace of physical well-being; then come apprehensions, a vague, general discomfort; then the disease declares itself, increases gradually until a slow decline sets in, and the long-drawn-out final agony. Sometimes this agony ends in death, as in the case of Renée and Germinie, and again it results even more terribly, in semi-imbecility with Coriolis, in senility with Demailly. Not a sigh or groan wrung from the victims by their suffering is spared us by the Goncourts; they fol-

low all its phases with a pitiless complacency ; they note its progress, and scrutinize its details with a refinement of cruelty.

One aspect of the disease has struck them especially ; that is, the powerlessness of will in the patient, the mental weakness and atrophy of all personal force.

For instance, Charles Demailly has married an actress, a pretty girl without mind or heart. This is doubtless a misfortune, but it is not one confined to him alone. In the history of letters more than one example can be found of mismated authors. Some of them have hardly allowed their ill-fortune to disturb their equanimity, but have proceeded with the routine of literary production, writing neither better nor worse in consequence. Others have found in this mischance a positive aliment to their genius, and have owed to their domestic infelicity their most stinging satires, and to the falseness of their wives their most touching poems. But Demailly has neither the pliancy to profit by his misfortune, nor the energy to react against it. He makes no resistance ; he lets himself go, and abandons the struggle. In this defeat and disorder of his sensibilities, he ends by making shipwreck of his mind as well.

Coriolis has made his favorite model, Manette Salomon, his mistress. Little by little Manette installs herself as mistress of his hearth. She

assumes the tone of command, puts on the airs of a despot, makes a desert round the artist by driving all his old friends from the studio, and introducing instead a horde of her own relatives, thus turning it into a sort of squalid Jewry. Such events are common enough in the lives of painters; they are, indeed, quite regular and frequent. But what is peculiar to Coriolis is that he does not defend even his talent against Manette's encroachments; he renounces all his ambitions, and the artistic refinements that have made his success; he abandons his originality, modifies his whole conception of art, and falls into small prettinesses and the painting of pot-boilers. He cannot even preserve his artistic conscience, and the *artist* loses all will-power as well as the man.

In these two instances we see a feeble will yielding to a stronger one. The case of Madame Gervaisais is more singular, for we are concerned here with a *person* conquered by *things*.

Madame Gervaisais arrives in Rome in possession of a healthy mind, and that somewhat narrow good sense which seems closed against all save positive knowledge, and perfectly secure from the influence of the supernatural.

Little by little, amid those religious surroundings, she feels her heart melting within her. From that atmosphere impregnated with Catholicism, from the splendor of the churches and the

long succession of services, there comes an influence that penetrates her being, transforming her into a new creature. She has breathed in religious faith with the ambient air; mysticism has been borne in upon her with the odors of the incense; her personality has been absorbed by her surroundings; her soul is powerless to prevail against the soul of things.

This fashion the Goncourts have of representing the play of human activities explains why they have never achieved a dramatic work. The stage lives by action. Action is the struggle of the will against the obstacles opposed to it by man and circumstance; but it is just this struggle of which their characters are most incapable.

This explains also the absence of logic in the Goncourt novels. Their personages act with an utter lack of sequence and purpose. Their deeds are not the result of their characters, for the inner spring of action is wanting in them. They are at the mercy of every influence, and vary with every passing caprice; and as they have no rule by which they direct their conduct, so we have none by which to judge it. There is no comparison possible between ourselves and them, therefore we cannot reason by analogy. Are these beings real? It may be; but we cannot pronounce whether they be true or false, for they defy any just estimate of the reason. Hence

comes the impression of melancholy produced by these books; the death-agonies they recount are less painful than the lives that precede them, for these are stories of perpetual defeat. The men who move through them are inapt for life, since *living is willing*. These books are monographs of the vanquished, silhouettes of infirmity, and their very thinness and harshness bring out the modern element in higher belief.

v.

Modern as the Goncourts are in their choice of subject, they are still more so in their selection of a medium of expression. Here they show themselves truly uncompromising. Tradition is their especial enemy; they go so far as to insinuate that antiquity may have been invented by professors of the classics to supply their daily bread, and it is a bread on which they refuse to be fed. They disapprove still more of the academic style, which they regard as a base imitation of classical antiquity. They have introduced into one of their novels a representative of academic art named Garnotelle; and there are no ironies, sarcasms, or insults which seem to them too strong for Garnotelle. They also regard this age as a period of decadence to which the same art-processes are not suitable as to periods of

maturity. In their opinion it is better to be a Lucan than the last of Virgil's imitators.

They have therefore striven to find an appropriate style for our decadence, and they have christened this style *artistic writing*.

In order to learn in what artistic writing consists, it seems the natural course to address ourselves to its inventors, and ask them for a definition.

Here is one, borrowed, it appears, from Théophile Gautier: "The artist sense is wanting in an infinite number even of the cleverest people. Many persons do not see. For example, out of twenty-five people who pass us here, there are hardly two who see the color of the wall-paper (*that is absolutely correct*). . . . Now, if possessing this artist sense, you work in an artistic form, if to the idea of form you add the form of the idea. . . . Oh, then, you are no longer understood at all!"

Aristotle has already spoken somewhere of the "form of hats," but evidently that is not the same thing; and if we are obliged to content ourselves with this sibyline explanation, we might be led to regard *artistic writing* as a mere mystification. Or perhaps artistic writing is merely another name for preciousness of style, for the Goncourts are distinctly *précieux*. The only writers whom they praise, and upon whom they model themselves, are

stylists, such as La Bruyère. Literary aristocrats as they are, they dread above all things the reproach of speaking the language of everybody. They aim at extraordinary forms of speech and unusual combinations of words. Their Chassagnol excels in the art of definition by enigmas; it is his harmless mania. Thus he defines a picture: "The poetic orient of Childe Harold and Don Juan under a Rembrandt sun — isn't that about it? Childe Harold Rembrandtized."¹ There is something of Chassagnol in the Goncourts; they affect the subtilized quintessence of speech, and they do not stop at the confines of the ridiculous. Listen to this snatch of conversation: —

"But tell me, monsieur, do you never go anywhere? I believe I have never seen you."

"It is owing to my sex, mademoiselle."

"What do you mean — your sex?"

"Yes, mademoiselle. You will admit that there are tortures and tortures. Fancy, for instance, having one's head cut off — how frightful!"

"What an idea!"

"But fancy also being tickled to death on the soles of your feet — how abominable! Well, mademoiselle, what should you say to a torment half-way between tickling and decapitation, a — a sort of friendly flaying, so to speak?"

"What are you talking about?"

¹ "Manette Saloman," p. 396.

"Why, of having my beard shaved, of course." ¹

Why could he not say so at once? And do not imagine that the gentleman who makes these pretty remarks is exhibited to us as a grotesque. Far from it. He is one of our authors' favorites and chief spokesmen. This is their idea of graceful badinage — the small change of conversation.

In default of a definition, let us try at least to decipher the process that constitutes artistic writing; since, after all, the Goncourts' principal ambition was to restore our style.

The French language has hitherto been wielded and fashioned by persons in sound health. It appears that their descendants are "the most nervous and sensitive of men, the greatest seekers after the record of indescribable sensations, utterly incapable, therefore, of contenting themselves with the rude negligences of speech that satisfied their healthy predecessors." ²

The problem is therefore to create a language supple enough to lend itself to all the needs and caprices of their delicate sensibilities, rich enough in tones and shades to render everything, — the visible first, then the invisible, the impalpable, the intangible and imponderable, — a language that shall rival and blend all the arts, sculpturing thought, spiritualizing painting, and painting music. This is what the Goncourts are striving

¹ "Charles Demailly," p. 213. ² "La Faustin," p. 165.

for. They take as their point of departure the plastic phrase of the picturesque writers and the musical phrase of Flaubert. But they remark that both Flaubert and Gautier have one defect in common with all writers in rude health, and that is a respect for syntax. They recall the saying of Gautier: "If you have a good syntax, you have everything;" and they reproach Flaubert with constructing his periods like a rhetorician. For them the first aim is to break up their syntax. They claim the right of inversion; they split up their phrase, disjoint it, and then proceed to adorn it. M. Edmond de Goncourt, when wishing to bring himself and his brother on the scene in "Les Frères Zemganno," chose for their doubles, not without reason, a pair of acrobats, — Gianni, whose hands are "always at work, upsetting the law of gravitation and thwarting the law of equilibrium by making objects stand at impossible angles,"¹ and Nello, who walks on his hands and practises every sort of leap. — the carp's leap, the monkey's leap, the Arab vault, and the somersault.

The writer's trade, as they practise it, is the trade of the clown and the acrobat.

But is it certain that man was created to walk on his hands, or the French language to turn somersaults?

The Goncourts, however, are convinced that

¹ "Les Frères Zemganno," p. 111.

syntax is an invention of Noël and Chapsal, and accordingly they refuse to bow to the mandates of these lexicographers. But may it not be that the laws of syntax correspond with the laws of the French mind, and are founded on nature?

The mould of language being once cracked, nothing stands in the way of piling up and accumulating words. The Goncourts are not backward in this direction; in fact, they do double work at it.

The epithet being the writer's special mark, their great concern is to "hound on the epithet." They ceaselessly pursue rare epithets; they variegate their style with highly colored epithets, "painted blue and red and green." This pursuit of the word that paints, and the highly colored expression, is common to all the picturesque writers; but the Goncourts distinguish themselves from others by the profusion of abstract words with which they besprinkle their style.

They say, "the abrupt of the rock invaded the ledges" — "a sexless thinness" — and "the beautiful is reality seen through the personality of genius." They create words and turns of expression, and they make their boast of it; for is it not a well-known fact that the progress of language is due to neologisms? Will the day therefore come when it will be customary to say, a *jolité*, a *lorgnerie*, the *trémulation d'un éblouissement*? It is

possible, though not likely. But never, while the French language endures, will it be permissible to write: "Our head, our whole life, had its finger on the pulse of our heart." I take one example out of a hundred.

The Goncourts — and this is their failing — have ventured to the limit of sheer nonsense, and beyond it.

With a language thus enriched and made supple, and with all these new resources of style, they are able, in their descriptive passages, to reproduce every detail of their vision, and to render every "effect." Painters are in the habit of trying to produce an ensemble, something that composes; but the Goncourts draw up a progressive enumeration of all the various features of their model. If they wish to show us a procession, they describe every banner in order, and the costume of every banner-bearer. If it is a ball they are painting, they describe in succession each toilet and mask they meet from the entrance door to the mirror on the farthest wall. There is no central point in their pictures; they see only a succession of details; their vision is eminently progressive and fragmentary. In giving a color-impression they proceed in the same way, by constant touching up; they lay on their colors with little dabs of the brush. Thus they paint with repeated strokes the blue of a cloudless sky: —

“A blue sky, in which she fancied she could see the promise of eternal fine weather — a sky of a soft, pale, milky blue, as if washed in with water-colors — an infinitely blue sky, without cloud, fleck, or stain — a profound, transparent sky rising in pure azure to the heights of ether — a sky with the crystal clearness of skies mirrored in water, the limpidity of the infinite floating on a southern sea — that Roman sky, to which the neighborhood of the Mediterranean and all the unknown causes of perfect skies preserve all day long the youth and freshness of the awakening dawn.”

They affect that construction of phrase in which the subordinate propositions all refer to the same subject many times repeated. Notice that the result of this system is to suppress all subordination, to give the same importance to all the propositions, and consequently to all parts of the thing seen. This is, in fact, what happens with their descriptions; all the details are on the same plane, all have the same value. They are a jumble of lines, a sampling of shades; they dance and dazzle; and this is, perhaps, the very definition for which we are seeking; artistic language is a dazzlement of style.

It is not necessary for me to say, for it has never been contested, that the Goncourts have attained, by the aid of extreme elaboration, to effects of rare subtlety and intensity; and I

need not remind the reader that not only pages, but chapters, and even entire books of theirs, are written in a much more subdued style. But it is in its extremes that the characteristics of a system may be best observed. The Goncourts are artists above all, and they work for artists. They paint "bits" for the benefit of those connoisseurs who, in presence of a great picture, go straight to the rendering of a *bit* of shoulder, or fall into ecstasies over a flesh-tint.

They are men of letters, too; and they write for professionals, who appreciate especially in a work the merit of conquering difficulties. Perhaps it is evident by this time what difficulties there are in writing in this style, and how this frantic pursuit of rare epithets was enough to upset the equilibrium of both brothers, and cause the death of one of them. Difficult as it is to write, this style is equally difficult to read. It fatigues us by its continual tension, and disconcerts us by its eccentricity. It is irritating to the nerves, and falls at last into obscurity and bathos. In ceasing to be intelligible, it ceases to be French.

M. Edmond de Goncourt quotes triumphantly the opinions of that other stylist, Joubert. "Foreigners will see the merely striking, where the habits of our language cause us at once to see the bizarre;" and he does not perceive how bizarre it is to invoke the authority of these same foreigners,

in whom are lacking precisely the instincts and the traditions of our language.

But it is to this his theories have brought him, and the aphorism is still true: "Woe to those works of art whose beauty is for artists only!" A language that is reserved for the initiated, that disdains to enter into communication with the profane, and fears contact with the open air, is on the way to become a foreign language.

VI.

It may be that the Goncourts, in spite of their claim, are not the principal initiators of the changes in modern literature; but they have doubtless exerted a great influence. It remains for us to determine more closely the nature of that influence. No one denies that they brought the art of the eighteenth century into fashion again, but this is of importance chiefly to the amateurs of old prints. That they initiated the Japanese craze is a title to fame, but more especially among curiosity dealers. That they brought upon us the mania for collecting bibelots is an undoubted fact, but one that has led principally to a revival in our system of interior decoration. When we come to literature, properly speaking, what influence have they exerted upon that, and into what paths have they led it? There is a mistaken impression

abroad on this subject, and M. Edmond de Goncourt himself shared it.

It was in 1870, after the death of Jules de Goncourt, that the novels of the two brothers began to be read. As ill-luck would have it, this beginning of their popularity coincided with the rise of a new taste in the public, — an outbreak of unbridled coarseness in literature. This coarseness continues to be one of the distinguishing features of naturalism. The naturalists having triumphed, M. de Goncourt recalled the fact that the Goncourts had formerly described the hysterical love-affairs of a housemaid and the son of a dairy-woman; he concluded therefrom that they were the ancestors of naturalism, and that the whole movement proceeded from them.

From this moment he noted with jealous care everything in the new school which might seem to be borrowed from their books. He claims the paternity of the whole invention. He asserts his ownership of an idea here, a formula there, even of an expression or a word. In order that this literary patronage may be officially recognized, he forms the scheme of the Goncourt Academy, which is to quite outdo Cardinal Richelieu.

Then happened what often happens to the man who aspires to lead a movement, — he follows it. This head of a school went to school to his disciples. In order not to be surpassed in violence, he,

who in collaboration with his brother had signed, as his share, exquisite pages of "Sister Philomena" and "Renée Mauperin," descended to writing a "Fille Elisa" and a "Faustin."

His success was an injury to him. He lost the best part of his talent, and he accepted all the folderol of the theorists in fiction. He spied out the latest follies, as they appeared on the literary horizon, and proceeded to announce them with authority. He asserted that a novelist should be at the same time a physician and a scientist. In the preface to a book devoted to the description of houses of ill-fame in Paris and the Provinces, he took oath upon his soul and conscience that he had written a "chaste and austere" book.

He maintained that since it is well known that Cabanis, Bichat, and Claude Bernard were masters of contemporary fiction, a novelist ought to occupy himself, in the first place, with the study of the heredity, then of the temperament, then of the surroundings, of his characters. In "Chérie" he applied himself to this task, having first taken pains to surround himself with all the usual and unusual appliances for this sort of work.

At the same time, by a contradiction which may seem odd, but is far from rare, an old leaven of romanticism began to stir in the naturalist. He brought upon the scene a horsewoman of immense wealth, galloping about the world with all

the load of ennui of a multi-millionaire ; an actress who before playing the rôle of Phèdre requires the emotional stimulus of a fatal passion ; he painted moonlight love-scenes in a Scotch castle, and dead men who laugh.

In conclusion, I admit that the attitude taken by the survivor of the two authors, and perhaps also the evolution of his talent, may mislead his readers as to its original drift. But it is important in judging it to understand the real nature and import of the joint work of the brothers ; it is important to the reputation of the Goncourts. They were not the inventors of naturalism ; they are responsible neither for its sins nor its glories. After "Mme. Bovary," "Germinie Lacerteux" could not be a new revelation, though it might be a different one. And on the other hand, if characters like his Jupillon and Gautruche are real types, it is not the author of "Germinie," but the author of "L'Assommoir," the painter of Gervaise and Coupeau, who can lay claim to being the first to write, at least in part, the history of the populace of Paris.

Are the brothers realists ? So many elements have entered into the definitions of realism that one no longer quite knows, in speaking of it, what is in question.

The Goncourts are realists in this sense, that they look closely at the world about them, and

paint faithfully what they have seen, and nothing but what they have seen.

It must be added at once, however, that the pursuit of the rare — of rare types, rare sentiments, and rare words — is exactly the opposite of realism; and this pursuit is a special characteristic of the Goncourts' talent. They are, above all things, dainty and fastidious; they have done nothing that is not highly *distingué*. They are artists, disdainful of all but the purely artistic; and this is the direction in which their influence has been exerted.

These men of letters and creatures of nerves have contributed to the tendency in the literature of our day to address itself especially to professionals and nervous subjects, containing, as it does, less and less of what can touch other men — those who, not making a trade of literature, are content to be *men* who think, dream, and remember, and who, without thought of their nerves, are moved to feel and suffer.

These writers have narrowed, confined, and impoverished the subject-matter of literature, and concentrated their interest on questions of form.

If the written language of France has deviated more and more from the true French tongue; if literary art has become more and more an art of idle curiosity, a literature of local and special interest, — it is that the hour has at last struck

for the success of the Goncourts, and they have at last found those who will admire and imitate them.

Their work has been the most persevering, conscientious, and laborious effort to empty literature of its contents.



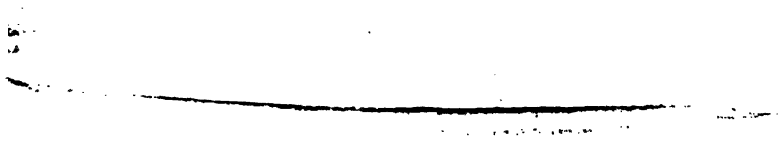


ÉMILE ZOLA.





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THE author of the "Rougon-Macquarts" has passed the age of fifty; he has published thirty-five volumes, and has therefore reached the point in his career when a writer, even if he has not yet ended his work, has little more to teach us.

The tumult that was once raised about his name has gradually subsided. Both the wrath and the enthusiasm excited by his erratic pen have calmed down. No one now contests his talents; moreover, though he exercised for a time a great influence over the younger writers, the new generation is escaping more and more from that influence.

We can therefore speak of him and his work with perfect impartiality. It is already a story of yesterday, almost an affair of the past.

I.

M. Émile Zola was born in Paris in 1840, of parents who had settled in Provence. He passed his early youth at Aix, coming up to Paris to com-

plete his studies. On leaving college without a degree, he found himself in a state of absolute poverty, and was forced to accept any subordinate position that offered in order to support himself. A situation in the publishing house of Hachette secured him daily bread, and enabled him to begin writing. In 1864 he published his first book, the collection of "Contes à Ninon" ("Stories told to Ninon"); in 1871 appeared the first volume of the "Rougon-Macquart" series. Success came slowly at first, until, on the publication of "L'Assommoir," it suddenly assumed formidable proportions. To-day M. Zola is the one of our novelists whose works have the largest sale, and he continues to publish at least one every two years. These brief lines comprise M. Zola's biography; it is that of a worker wholly absorbed in his task.

In plain words, it is the life of a respectable small bourgeois; for M. Zola belongs by his habits as well as by his birth to the French middle class. Methodical and regular, he settles down at his writing-table each day at the same hour and for the same length of time, just as another man would go to his office. He is a family man, with no taste for society; his expenditures are in exact proportion to his earnings. He affects the comfortable and substantial in his mode of living. As soon as his fortune permitted, he carried out the unflinching dream of the bourgeois, and became a

landed proprietor. He owns a country house at Meudon, of which he superintended the building in person, furnishing it in mediæval style.

Having attained a great position in literature, he disdains none of the outward signs of success. He has accepted a decoration, and solicits a seat in the French Academy. Doubtless, like every one else, M. Zola has repeatedly maligned what he calls "that effete institution which persists in living on into a new age. . . . The great current of modern thought, which some day will inevitably sweep it away, now flows by it without concern as to what it may be thinking or doing. There are years when we might positively believe that the Academy had ceased to exist, so dead does it seem. And yet vain-glory still drives our authors to adorn themselves with it, as they might put on a ribbon. The Academy has become a mere vanity, and will finally crumble away on the day when all virile minds refuse to join a company to which Molière and Balzac did not belong."

We need not argue from this, that because M. Zola presents himself to-day for the honors of the Academy, he has not a virile mind; nor should we accuse him of inconsequence; it would not even do to say that he wishes, in his generosity, to afford the Academy a means of repairing the injustice done to Balzac. He simply wishes to

enjoy all the advantages attached to his position, and he thinks it only suitable that he should obtain every legitimate satisfaction.

One of the first characteristics that strikes us in M. Zola, and one that has often been pointed out to his honor, is the predominance of will-power. Endowed with average talents, by sheer strength of will he has reached the point he wished to attain, and in just the way he wished. One of the words that recurs oftenest under his pen is the word *conquer*. His heroes sally forth from a small provincial shop to conquer Paris. In the same way he has conquered his fame. Ignored for ten years, much contested afterwards, he has gone straight ahead, with the same heavy stride, tracing his furrow as he went; he has persisted in the same methods and the same faults, and at last he has carried the day.

This wilful obstinacy, combined with extreme narrowness of mind, has developed into an imperturbable assurance, and a prodigious confidence in the ideas he has advanced and the work he has done. It is thus that M. Zola has made himself the head of a school. It is commonly said of him that he is a force.

Another trait, not less striking, is vulgarity of nature. Whenever M. Zola speaks in his own name, whether in critical work or in newspaper articles, it is in a tone of the densest triviality. It

is not merely wit that he lacks. He has no wit, and he knows it; indeed, far from blinking the fact, he boasts of it; nor is it merely elegance and delicacy that are lacking, it is the most elementary tact.

He has been reproached with pride and infatuation with himself, and has denied the charge. I do not, in fact, believe that he has a greater share of pride than many writers who are his inferiors. He merely yields to that instinct impelling vulgar natures to put themselves forward and make a display.

He has been reproached also with the violence of his polemics, yet he is not spiteful or malicious — good-natured, rather; but he is naturally emphatic in speech, and addicted to loud talk and vociferation about trifles. Therefore he has fallen tooth and nail upon all writers who do not belong to his school, and upon all artists who do not paint like Manet. It is all because he is totally destitute of a sense of measure, and divides humanity summarily into two categories, — great good men and idiots.

This literary man has, moreover, little taste for literature, and only a moderate respect for it, in spite of his loud protestations. He has no literary culture nor desire to acquire it. Of antiquity and of our great literary epochs he understands only so much as can be acquired by a student at the

university, who is very much bored at being there. Like all unlettered persons, he makes the history of literature begin with his contemporaries.

For science, on the other hand, he professes a gaping and unintelligent admiration. He talks of it like a country schoolmaster. "We live only upon science. . . . It is science that is preparing the twentieth century. We shall be the more virtuous and happy in proportion as science abolishes the ideal, the absolute, the unknown." ¹

He is also quite incapable of tasting the delights of art. True artists, even those who become disgusted with their work as soon as it is finished, because it falls below their ideal, know at least the delight that attends the progress of work, the joy of creating, of seeing their idea take form and shape. But M. Zola writes as a man goes about some repellent task or engages in a toilsome trade, impatient for the moment when he can retire, and let the whole thing go. "How terrible the hours become," he writes, "from the moment I begin a novel! . . . and when it is finished, oh, when it is finished, what a relief! not the relief of the gentleman who exults over the fruit of his brain, but that of the porter who throws down his load with an oath when it is breaking his back."²

Is the author, then, tormented, as he would have

¹ "Le Roman Experimental" ("Experimental Fiction").

² "L'œuvre," p. 353.

us believe, by the desire of perfection, the despair of ever satisfying himself?

"I still weep with rage over my manuscripts. I call myself an idiot twenty times a day. I never send out a book without believing it inferior to its forerunners."¹

But the concern for perfection is what is most wanting to these works, which succeed each other with the most surprising inequalities, a bad one after a mediocre or a good one, as luck will have it; books that grow up rankly, and in which the materials are heaped together with no thought of selection. These rages of the author against himself are merely the result of temperament, the effects of an irritable disposition.

His biographer says of him: "A pessimist inclined to see the dark side of everything, he continually believes that he has done nothing, that all is going from bad to worse with him, that he is the most unfortunate of men. He is famous without being happy; and while in excellent health, is always fancying himself ill."²

If you wish his own testimony on this point, these are the terms in which he describes himself: "I am not at all gay or amiable, nor a scapegrace given to flattering the ladies; I am tragical, high-

¹ Zola, "Les Romanciers Naturalistes" ("The Naturalistic Novelists").

² Paul Alexis, "Émile Zola."

tempered, splenetic." His is an inferior kind of pessimism, — the discontent of a man bored by life, the morose disposition of a hypochondriac.

From all these traits we are able to evoke the personality of the author of "Rougon-Macquarts," — a far from complex personality, at the same time vigorous and trivial.

II.

M. Zola possesses some of the qualities of the rhetorician, such as a systematic turn of mind, the gift of taking short views, a disputatious humor, and great intrepidity of assertion. Therefore the naturalist school has hailed him as its chief, or at least as its recognized representative and spokesman. But, on the other hand, he is lacking in certain qualities without which no one has a right to handle literary and artistic subjects. He is destitute to the last degree of all critical sense; naturally he does not admit this, but strives to create an illusion to the contrary by repeating to satiety: "I have a strong critical sense. . . . I have too much of the critical sense." And nothing could have a droller sound than this phrase coming as a conclusion to some particularly absurd dictum or grotesque judgment. Moreover, he is incapable of following out an abstract idea, and his materialistic language is powerless to express delicate shades of meaning. As soon as he attempts to

render a general idea, he becomes embarrassed, or as he would say, "he gets scared." His phraseology grows confused; and his style resembles that of a mason discoursing on architecture, or a house-painter explaining the theory of complementary colors. He has cloven romanticism in twain a score of times; but each time this figurative phrase, "*le coup de folie du romantisme*" (the acute mania of romanticism), has taken the place of definition or argument.

According to him, lyric poets are those "who have a brain so constructed that it seems to them the largest and sanest view of life to dream over again the dreams of antiquity, and to see the world through the medium of their distracted brains and shattered nerves." Elsewhere he writes: "If we can never present nature in its entirety, we will at least give you the truth about human nature, whilst others *complicate the deviations of their personal vision with the delusions of an imaginary nature which they accept empirically as the true one.*"¹ After which he finds fault with us for not understanding him! He is certainly at his weakest in what he naïvely denominates "his critical work."

Taking naturalism in its most general meaning, it is only realism kept in touch with the progress

¹ Zola, "*Le Roman Expérimental*" ("Experimental Fiction").

of science, or, to speak more accurately, it is a tendency to assimilate the processes of literature and those of science. M. Zola remarks that the development of the scientific spirit is the great fact of this century. Thus he dreams of introducing science into literature. According to him, the naturalist formula is simply "the scientific method applied to letters." This preoccupation with science never leaves him. As Balzac claimed descent from Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, so M. Zola professes to be the disciple of a savant, but one who was not a writer, — Claude Bernard.

The treatise in which he sets forth his theory of *experimental fiction* is made up of citations borrowed from "The Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine." In it he recommends that the novelist be at the same time a naturalist, a physiologist, a chemist, a doctor; he merely neglects to warn him that whatever he does, he must remain a man of letters. He writes confidently: "We naturalists — we men of science." . . .

The first requisite for a novelist trained in the school of Claude Bernard is observation. Here we should be in full accord with M. Zola, if we were not forced to reproach him with satisfying himself somewhat too cheaply on this point, and giving frequent evidence of singular carelessness and the most superficial habits of observation.

He is exceedingly proud of himself for having

gone down the pit of a mine when about to write a miner's story; and again, when writing one about railroads, for having mounted a locomotive and ridden, I believe, the entire distance from Paris to Mantes. The sort of admiration he feels for himself when he deigns to cast an eye on the object he wishes to paint, suffices to prove how little he suspects what that slow, patient, minute process of investigation is which science requires. For his part, he gives himself no such trouble; a simple glance suffices him.

That is what his friend and biographer, M. Paul Alexis, gives us to understand, supporting his assertion by a weight of evidence such as the following: The author of "Pot-Bouille," wishing to describe a bourgeois residence, "after a *walk* to the Rue de Choiseul, where he had located his bourgeois dwelling, and a *visit* to the Church of St. Roch, where several of his scenes were to be laid, he departed for the country, *armed at all points*, and ready to begin his work." In the "Curée" he describes the hotel of M. Meunier, of which he knows only the façade. In the "Faute de l'Abbé Mouret," "the profuse descriptions of plants were not derived from catalogues only; the novelist carried his conscientiousness so far as to visit horticultural exhibitions."

What are we to think of this homage paid to the conscientiousness of a writer who goes the length

of looking at a plant before describing it? We may well pray to be delivered from our friends! All would be well, however, if M. Zola described only what he had seen with his own eyes, and if his observation, rapid and superficial though it may be, were direct observation; but he is easily satisfied with second-hand information, and borrows largely from printed sources. In "Son Excellence Eugène Rougon," he wishes to show us the imperial court at Compiègne. He has never visited Compiègne; but, nothing daunted, he turns to a work entitled, "Memoirs of a Valet-de-Chambre," where he finds all he requires. "L'Assommoir" is made out of the "Sublime" of Denis Poulot. In "La Fortune des Rougon," the details of the insurrection in Provence are taken from the "History of the Coup d'État," by M. Trénot. What does all this indicate, if not that M. Zola here plays the part, not of an eye-witness, but simply of a stage-setter. He constructs his literary work from the testimony of others. Doubtless authors have always had this privilege; but M. Zola claims to be, above all, a scientist.

There is another process to which M. Zola attributes special importance, and which, according to him, is the great novelty of the school, a specialty of the firm, as it were; to wit, Experimentation. The naturalist novel is called also the experimental novel. This is how M. Zola explains the theory

on which it is constructed, taking as an example the figure of Baron Hulot in "La Cousine Bette : " "As soon as Balzac has chosen his subject, he proceeds from the facts he has observed, and carries on his experiment by subjecting Hulot to a series of tests, making him pass through various trains of circumstance to show how the mechanism of his passion works. It is therefore evident that this is not only observation, but experiment."¹ Such a passage as this is sufficient to show that M. Zola does not know what he is talking about. The scientist *can* experiment, because, having once intervened to try the experiment, he withdraws, leaving the natural forces to act alone, and later he verifies the results that have been brought about apart from his action; on one side we have the savant who looks on, and upon the other, nature which acts. No such duality exists in the case of the writer, it being he who devises the experiment, he also who devises the results; the whole process goes on within his own brain. Doubtless experimentation is a fine thing; but there must be some occasion to employ it, and it would hardly be more absurd to recommend its practice to the mathematician than to the novelist.

In fact, the very idea with which the naturalists set out is a false one. There is no possible assimilation between the work of the scientist,

¹ Zola, "Le Roman Expérimental" ("Experimental Fiction").

which is impersonal, and that of the writer, who can never make complete abstraction of his personality. From this error springs another, whose consequences are in the highest degree important. The naturalist claims for himself the same right as the scientist, of saying everything and depicting everything without concern for morality, and in the name of a "higher interest."

"We cannot imagine a chemist becoming incensed with nitrogen because that substance is unfavorable to life, or sympathizing tenderly with oxygen for the contrary reason. . . . We authors give instruction in the bitter science of life; we teach the lofty lesson of reality. This is what exists, we say; reconcile yourself to it. . . . I know no school more moral or more austere."¹

Accordingly, on this ground, all pictures of the basest realism and the most ignoble vice are justified. But it by no means follows that because the word "morality" has no meaning in a scientific sense, it has therefore no meaning in relation to speculations of a totally different order. Just as it may be true that nothing is beautiful or ugly in the eyes of the scientist, yet it does not follow that beauty and ugliness have no existence for the artist. The reader's frame of mind has also to be taken into account; and here, in fact, lies the whole question. The most

¹ Zola, "Le Roman Expérimental."

serious-minded reader, and the least inclined to look for coarse meanings, does not approach a novel in exactly the same frame of mind he would bring to the study of an anatomical chart.

It is by eliminating our imagination and our sensibilities that we reach the mental state which the naturalist should bring to his laboratory, the physician to his clinic. It is with our entire being, on the contrary, that we absorb the work of the writer of fiction; we give him our whole soul, and he should be the last to complain of it.

But in return, we have the right to ask him to remember that we are not all reason, that we have also senses and an imagination. Out of the one hundred thousand purchasers of "Nana," M. Zola is well aware that there were many who only sought to satisfy a curiosity they were ashamed to own; he knows also that there was not one reader who opened his book for the mere purpose of making a scientific study of the question of prostitution.

We see now wherein the naturalist doctrine is fallible, and it is at its very foundation. In fact, as a doctrine, naturalism does not exist; or rather, by its admixture of dangerous errors, it has merely retarded and turned from its true course the legitimate and profitable movement of modern realism.

III.

In the case of other writers, we may, without disadvantage, neglect their theories, which are usually constructed after the fact, and in order to justify their accomplished work. But it is different with M. Zola. With him the theories preceded the work, and determined its direction; and we see no sign of their having been modified in the course of it.

In 1871 he wrote as an introduction to the novel that opened the "Rougon-Macquart" series: "I wish to explain how a family, a little group of beings, acts upon society, as it expands to give birth to ten or twenty individuals, who appear at first sight profoundly dissimilar, but who are shown by analysis to be closely bound one to another. Heredity has its laws, like gravitation. I shall attempt, while solving the double question of heredity and environment, to trace and follow up the clew that conducts mathematically from one man to another man."

And recently again in "L'œuvre," Pierre Sandoz, speaking in the name and place of the author, takes up and carries out these same theories, without modification, and terminates his dogmatic statement by an invocation to nature and the earth: "Thou alone shalt be the primal force in my work, the means and the end; the immense

ark in which all things are animated by the breath of all beings. . . . Is it not stupid to assign a soul to each one of us where there is this great soul!"

Such are the theories which M. Zola has never wearied of applying with the utmost conscientiousness and the most tiresome monotony.

First comes the group of individuals bequeathing, one to another, a temperament which goes on modifying itself according to inflexible laws; this is the Rougon-Macquart family, whose genealogical tree is to be found in "Une Page d'Amour."¹ At the base is the hysterical woman, Adelaide Fouque, whose nervous affection is destined to develop by turns, in her descendants, into drunkenness, profligacy, homicidal mania, religious exaltation, and even genius.

Then comes the environment; First, the ensemble of historical circumstances, the setting furnished by the Second Empire; next, the special environment due to the profession and habits of each individual.

We are transported, in the course of the successive narratives, into the world of the small provincial bourgeoisie,² the business world,³ and the Halles;⁴ we are introduced to clerical society,⁵

² "La Fortune des Rougons." ³ "La Curée."

⁴ "Ventre de Paris."

⁵ "La Conquête de Plassans," "La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret."

to the political world,¹ to the haunts of workingmen,² the minor theatres and the demi-monde;³ we are shown the great Paris shops⁴ and the Parisian bourgeoisie,⁵ the mining population,⁶ the artist community,⁷ the peasantry,⁸ the employees of a railway company,⁹ and lastly, the world of financiers and stock-jobbers.¹⁰

It still remains for the author to give us an army novel and a scientific novel; this last, which is to crown the edifice, will be at the same time a synthesis of the entire work, a book of large generalizations, in which the thinker will say his final word.

In order to set the varied surroundings of his people before us with perfect distinctness, M. Zola has recourse to the use of technical terms; hence those interminable enumerations which he borrows from special treatises and business manuals. He gives us, for instance, the manual of the perfect pork-butcher, in which we must be prepared to see defile before us the whole series of objects connected with that trade; to wit, sausages, galantines, black-puddings, ham, lard, lean bacon and larded bacon, bread-crumbs for breading, spices, cloves, nutmegs, skimmers, long-handled spoons and ladles, larding-pins, mechani-

¹ "Son Excellence Eugène Rougon." ² "L'Assommoir."
³ "Nana." ⁴ "Au Bonheur des Dames." ⁵ "Pot-Bouille."
⁶ "Germinal." ⁷ "L'œuvre." ⁸ "La Terre."
⁹ "La Bête Humaine." ¹⁰ "L'argent."

cal choppers, etc. Next we have the manual of the maker of church vestments; here it is. The "*Chanlatte*" which supports the embroidery-frame, the "diligent" with its cog-wheels and stitchers, a hand-wheel, bodkins, hammers, irons for cutting vellum, etc. The list of church ornaments follows, — the chasuble, the stole, the maniple, the alb, the amice, the chalice, the corporale.

Next comes a catalogue of carpets: rugs from Ispahan, Teheran, and Kermancha; Madras, Coula, and Gheurdil rugs, and so on. . . .

M. Zola does not seem to comprehend that though it may be a mistake to fight shy of technical names because they are not in common use, it is quite as puerile to lavish such names, most of which have no meaning for the general reader, and serve only to distract his attention, and make him laugh or yawn, according to his humor.

But it is not enough to name things, he must also make us see them; hence, there are innumerable descriptions. First come descriptions of Paris, — Paris emerging from the mists of dawn, Paris at sunset, Paris in the rain, Paris in the snow, Paris seen from the heights of Passy, Paris from the knoll of Montmartre. Then the line of the quays as seen from the Isle St. Louis, the quays from the Saints-Pères, the boulevards at eleven o'clock at night, the boulevards at mid-

night, the boulevards at two in the morning, the lake of the Bois de Boulogne under a setting sun, the lake on a warm afternoon. Next we have the Halles, and everything for sale at the Halles, and in all the adjoining streets, and at all the neighboring shops; then he describes a dry-goods store, its show-windows, its counters, and lunch-room; then a hotel in the Isle St. Louis, and a hotel in the Parc Monceau; a cathedral with its old tapestries and antique stained glass, several interiors of churches, a garden, and a green-house. . . . But to draw up a full list of these descriptions would be to analyze M. Zola's complete works; and all these descriptions correspond, or contrast, or shade into one another. We feel that the author bestows his whole care on them, puts forth all his resources, and makes them of the first consequence. Indeed, in a confidential moment he confesses that one of his novels was written simply with a view to the descriptions. And this is not all. Not only does the environment influence the individual to the point of absorbing him, not only do inanimate things crowd upon man to the point of extinguishing him; but they become animate, and while the man seems to be living, it is actually the things that are alive.

For instance, the two children, Miette and Silvère, seem born to love; their love emanates directly from the spot where they are in the habit

of meeting, the old churchyard of Saint-Mittre : " Their love had grown like a beautiful thriving plant, sprung from the mould in this nook of earth, fertilized by death ; and they explained to each other how the warm breaths that swept over their foreheads, the whispers heard amid the shadows, the long shudders that passed down the churchyard paths, were the souls of the dead, breathing their own vanished passions into their faces. . . . The dead, the dead of long ago, willed the marriage of Miette and Silvère." ¹

In " L'Assommoir " the responsible agent, the active, indefatigable brutalizer of the whole populace, is the still, the alembic of Père Colombe : " The still, with its strange-shaped vessels and its endless convolutions of pipe, wore a gloomy aspect ; it gave out no smoke ; one could barely hear, at intervals, an inward puffing, a subterranean snort ; it was like some strange work of darkness carried on in full day, with a labor that was powerful, dismal, and mute." It is this creature which wickedly pours madness with alcohol into the drinkers' blood.

In " Germinal " the personage of the first importance is the shaft of the mine. *Le Voreux*, who " swallows men by mouthfuls of twenty or thirty at a time, gulping them down so easily that he seems unconscious of their passing through his

¹ " La Fortune des Rougon."

jaws" — the *Voreux*, with the evil look of a greedy beast, crouching there to devour men" — the *Voreux* who will presently come crashing down upon a throng of miners, destroying them as his natural prey.

In "Au Bonheur des Dames" another living and malignant creature is the great shop, which devours the smaller traders, and draws to itself the vitality of the whole quarter. Such is the final expression of this materialistic art, which exhibits man as inert and passive, under the action of outward forces, and transfers life from men to things.

It would not be difficult to show how conventional and factitious is the use of such expedients. . . . Heredity is doubtless a fact recognized by science; but science hastens to add that its laws are infinitely varied and complicated, that the least accident may upset their march, and that here as elsewhere we must make up our minds to overlook a great deal. This is what M. Zola cannot consent to do. He assumes that its laws are fixed, and the instances of their working clearly established. Now, to apply in this precise and dogmatic fashion a law which is still unformulated, is perhaps more dangerous than to leave heredity out of the account altogether. M. Zola assumes that science has done its work, and takes its hypotheses for solutions. This process, if closely examined, turns out to be precisely the same as

that employed by M. Jules Verne in his "scientific" novels.

M. Zola assumes also that the question of the relation between our physical and moral natures is settled, or rather he solves it himself, in the sense of an intimate and perfect accord between them. To take but a single example: when he wishes to represent a man ambitious of power and authority, he bestows on him, of necessity, a lofty stature and an imposing presence. The soul of a despot in the body of a small man is, according to him, a phenomenon that has never been seen, a monstrosity that, for his part, he refuses to admit. There is a similar accord between the condition of life and the person. A pork-butcher must inevitably be fat and rosy, with a placid disposition; and between two fishwomen, one of whom sells fresh-water fish and the other salt, there will be a corresponding difference in character and appearance, everything about them bearing the unmistakable stamp of their trade.¹

The same harmony exists between the aspects of nature and human feeling. According as M. Zola's characters suffer or rejoice, obliging nature furnishes them with a stage-setting appropriate to the situation.

Are they in all the innocence and freshness of a budding love? they have, spread out before them,

¹ "Le Ventre de Paris."

a landscape bathed in the soft mists of morning. Are they burning with passion? they have before their eyes the blaze of a fiery sunset. Is it sadness that is to be framed? Nature supplies the mists and vapors. Or is an accompaniment wanted for the grief of a mother thinking of her dead child? Nature covers herself with white draperies, such as are fitting for a young girl's funeral. These are manifest signs of the intervention of the author, who manages matters at his pleasure, and prepares them in accordance with his personal fancy; in other words, they are so many conventions. Between the idealist convention, which sees only the soul and neglects the body, and the naturalist convention, which explains character by temperament and substitutes the movements of the blood for the impulses of passion; between the former, which isolates man from nature, and the latter, which makes him one with it, — we may take our choice, and pronounce in favor of one or the other, but one is no less false than the other.

All forms of rhetoric are alike, in that they alter and disarrange the true order of things; they are all of equal value, or rather, each has only the value of the work in which it is employed. The important thing, after all, is to enlighten us in regard to the great enigma of human nature.

Another of M. Zola's ambitions is to furnish us with an abundance of "human documents." It

is his pretension to have created a large work, inspired by a sense of reality; to have seen many things, and reproduced them with fidelity.

Let us see what he teaches us in regard to man and society in "The Natural and Social History of a Family under the Second Empire."

IV.

A writer cannot be judged by what he has attempted to do; the only question is whether he has succeeded. Let us grant to M. Zola that the human comedy can be explained by merely studying physiology and temperament, but we have at least the right to ask that he shall explain that comedy.

Events occur every day in real life; and in spite of his disdain for plot and action, there are events occurring even in his novels. Some of his men make fortunes and others are ruined; they help each other, and they commit dastardly acts, — treacheries, crimes, and assassinations. What chain of causes brings about each one of these events? It is of this that the true fatalist is bound to give an account. But this is precisely what M. Zola does not succeed in making clear.

Do we ask how the Abbé Faujas, arriving in Plassans in his threadbare soutane, amidst general hostility, succeeds in establishing himself by de-

grees, and becoming master of the whole town? What were his tactics and his methods of action? This is what the author forgets to tell us, though it is precisely the subject of his book. Do we ask how his Excellence Eugène Rougon, after falling from power, raises himself again, to fall anew, and again to rise? Do we ask in regard to each one of M. Zola's personages in turn, what is the series of motions that determines each of their actions? Of all this the author tells us nothing, simply because he knows nothing. The inner man is a sealed mystery to him. . . .

Divers elements concur in forming the personality of every individual, but this diversity escapes M. Zola. In drawing a physiognomy, he contents himself with seizing on some one prominent feature, and the portrait is completed once for all.

Nana, for instance, is a "fat blonde." Coupeau has "the face of a happy dog." Antoine Macquart has "the snarl of a tame wolf." Félicité Puech has "the flight of a grasshopper." One woman is always "that beggar of a Cadine;" another, "the squint-eyed Augustine." . . . We all have a forehead, eyes, a countenance; but what is there behind this human façade? what is going on within? Of this M. Zola knows nothing.

Therefore, the only beings he has succeeded in painting are those who do not, in fact, contain much, and in whose brains very little is going on,

— the simple-minded, primitive natures. Such are the idiot Désirée, whom he shows us healthy and happy amidst her beasts, and not very unlike them. Such are the gamins, sprung from the city pavements, like the young brute Marjolin, the vivacious monkey Jeanlin, and Muche, the ineffable Muche, that flower of the Paris gutter. He has also caught, very accurately, certain silhouettes, certain attitudes, tricks, and peculiarities. We can *see* the Lorilleux couple, half working-people, half bourgeois, drying up with dissatisfied vanity and envy. We see the old maid, Mlle. Sajet, trotting about from shop to shop, with her everlasting bag, prying, gossiping, and setting the whole quarter by the ears with her venomous chatter. We hear Mme. Lérat sprinkling her conversation with equivocal allusions, wrapped up so darkly that only she can understand them, and old Mère Fêtu with the whine of the beggar who knows his trade. I could go on multiplying examples; for there is no lack of minor characters like these in M. Zola's books, whom he has hit off with a sure touch. But where a more penetrating analysis and a more exhaustive study are required, M. Zola either draws back or fails. Hence comes his inability to depict certain classes of society. In proportion as men rise to a higher plane, where education is more thorough, habits are more refined, and the circle of ideas in which they move

grows more subtle, so does their intellectual mechanism become more complicated.

Thus a President of the Chambers is a more complex figure to draw than a zinc-worker; but M. Zola's analysis does not extend above the intellectual level of the zinc-worker. His nobles, his high-class adventuresses, his men of the world, his political men, are not even false; they do not exist. His priests are constructed *a priori*, after well-known types, such as the dogmatist, the mystic, and so on. It is not only coarseness of fancy, but the height of folly, that inspires his pictures of bourgeois households, in which the mothers train up their daughters to stupefy an aged relative with drink in order to extract twenty francs from him; where the young men invited as guests withdraw to the servants' quarters, and where a double cynicism of morals and language prevails. M. Zola is wholly at his ease only in the study of those circles where humanity exists in a rudimentary state. It is from these circles that he has drawn his two most successful books, "L'Assommoir," and "Germinal."

The entire populace of Paris is certainly not to be found in "L'Assommoir;" there is wanting the type of the industrious, patient workingman, who rises by degrees above his condition, and having bettered himself, leads his children on to conquer the rank of bourgeois. There is wanting

even the average type of workingman, neither entirely worthy nor utterly vicious. On the other hand, he has painted the idle, convivial, dissipated workingman to the life.

Coupeau was not altogether a vicious fellow at the start, being good-natured, obliging, and a steady workman. But one fine day he falls from a roof and breaks his leg while attempting to play a trick on his daughter. During his slow convalescence he acquires a taste for doing nothing; from idleness he passes to drunkenness by an insensible transition; then follows the rapid downfall into brutishness, and the final delirium. Gervaise, on her side, is wanting neither in love of work nor in decency, but with her the defect of nature is a lack of moral backbone. Scarcely has she tasted a little prosperity won by much hard work, than she abandons herself to it, lets herself go, is led on rather than warned by her husband's example, and ends by falling into depths of ignominy as low as his.

This history of the gradual ruin of a workingman's household is sketched to the life. The minor characters are not less well-drawn: it is a corner of the swarming life of the faubourgs set before us in its true light.

As for "Germinal," the characters are hardly men. They have been miners from father to son, beginning to descend into the mine as children, and

going on working there for twenty or thirty years, at a depth of a thousand feet or so below the earth, in silence and darkness. Their intelligence has had no chance to awaken; but they have the semblance of human beings, until the day when hunger unchains the wild beast within them, and they are driven on in a furious charge, like the stampede of maddened cattle, trampling down everything in their course. The finest pages of "Germinal" are certainly those devoted to the picture of the riot. M. Zola knows how to set in movement this mob of strikers, and precisely for the reason that a mob obeys only a blind instinct, and its collective fury is the result of a return to primitive, bestial humanity. This the author of "Germinal" has painted admirably.

To have shown the ravages of drunkenness among the working-class; to have handled masses carried away by sudden fury — these are certainly no commonplace achievements; but, on the other hand, they are but a small part of the programme announced by M. Zola, which was nothing less than to write the whole history of modern society.

v.

We come now to something more serious. When we take up M. Zola's work as a whole, and as we proceed in our perusal of it, we are conscious of a

strange impression emanating from its pages. We are transported into a world which is certainly not a realm of fancy or imagination, and yet is not the world of reality.

It is to explain this impression that the idea has arisen of styling M. Zola an epic poet. No qualification could be more inappropriate. For what characterizes the epic poet is doubtless that he magnifies reality; but in magnifying it he keeps at the same time the relative proportion of beings and things. To magnify, even to exaggerate, is not to distort; but in M. Zola's works we observe a perpetual distortion of the reality.

I will point out some of the reasons that explain this literary phenomenon. The first is the degree to which M. Zola is haunted by certain ideas, the sort of possession of which he is the victim. It has often been asserted that if he is prodigal, in his books, of gross details, it is through deliberate calculation, as a bait to draw readers and to push the sales. His enemies have frequently reproached him with this, and even his friends have testified to the share scandal has had in his success. M. Paul Alexis, his *naïf* biographer, writes: "While his first volume, 'Contes à Ninon,' was well received by the critics, it did not attain for the space of ten years to a sale of a thousand copies. As soon as the 'Confession de Claude' appeared, the author was denounced as a literary scavenger, and 'Thé-

rèse Raquin' was styled 'putrid literature;' yet this was the beginning of his success." . . . It is true that there has been, in this respect, a sort of progression in M. Zola's books; that since "L'Assommoir" the pictures of ignoble morals grow more and more numerous and glaring; that the latest in date of his novels, "La Terre" and "La Bête Humaine," are particularly rich in this respect, and that this progression coincides with a proportionate diminution in talent. But, on the whole, there is nothing but what is quite natural about this; it is inevitable that, in proportion as talent diminishes, faults should grow more exaggerated, and that a man should fall on the side to which he leans. There is no trace of calculation in all this; and it is proved by the fact that M. Zola has several times attempted to write chapters, and even whole books, of an irreproachable character, such as his idyls of youthful lovers, his novel "Une Page d'Amour," and that volume "Le Rêve," especially designed for young girls. Now, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that never does he appear coarser than when he is striving to be delicate. Always and everywhere sensual images pursue him; it is through the medium of such images that he habitually looks at nature. The sleeping landscape assumes in his eyes "a strange rioting of the passions," and so on. . . .

The powerlessness of the writer to dispel this

sort of vision testifies to the violence with which it besets him. The importance accorded to these details accords also with M. Zola's general conception of humanity. It is clear that such must be the result of reducing the nature of man to the primitive instincts of the brute.

Another quality that destroys M. Zola's sense of reality is the romantic turn of his imagination. He has many times revolted against this influence of romanticism which he finds deeply seated within himself.

"I have drunk too deeply of the romantic potion," he says. "I was born too late. If I indulge at times in rages against romanticism, it is because I hate it for the false literary education it has given me. I am of it, and this enrages me."¹

"Ah, we have all supped on the romantic broth. We dabbled too much in it in our youth, and we are still besmeared to the chin. . . . He was in despair over having been born at the confluence of Hugo and Balzac."²

The image is not wanting in *à propos*; the world that M. Zola paints suggests something hybrid and paradoxical, such as Balzac's world might be, seen through Hugo's eyes. But perhaps Hugo is not the guilty one in this matter after all. If M. Zola has never succeeded, in spite of his "raging"

¹ "Le Roman Expérimental," p. 271.

² "L'œuvre," p. 52.

efforts, in exorcising the romantic demon he feels within him, it is apparently because he is romantic, not by education alone, but by birth as well, and has romanticism in his blood.

Like all the romanticists, he feels within himself "the torment of a secret symbolism." Incapable of seeing reality except as it is conceived within his own brain, he attempts afterwards to turn this conception into a fine bit of symbolism full of the deepest meanings. We find traces of this attempt in each successive novel.

"*Le Ventre de Paris*" symbolizes clearly enough the hostility between the well-fed and the famished, the fat and the lean. "*Nana*" symbolizes the vengeance of the lowest classes upon society. In "*Germinal*" it is the symbolical intention that gives its enigmatical title to the book.

"Men were springing up, a black, avenging army, which ripened slowly in the furrows, growing for the harvests of a coming age when their germination would rend the earth asunder."¹

In fact, the entire work in its ensemble is a vast symbol. The miserable family of the Rougon-Macquarts symbolizes Imperial France, "an epoch of folly and shame."

Like all the romanticists, M. Zola has a taste for the marvellous; and he has it to the same degree as that for the basest realism. I have

¹ "*Germinal*" end.

already pointed out the mysterious *rôle* he assigns to inanimate nature.

He likes to create spectacles of fantastic terror; as, in "La Conquête de Plassans," the conflagration kindled by a madman; in "La Bête Humaine," the dizzy speed of a locomotive whirled along through space without guide or brake.

So he takes pleasure in "Germinal," in leading us through the sombre shafts of a mine, where spectral forms are moving about and lanterns twinkling through the darkness, where cries are heard that take on a tragic tone, and sound like the death-rattle out of those unknown depths.¹

This love of the marvellous reveals itself even in his choice of a subject. This family of the Rougon-Macquarts, doomed to guilty passions and to vices of all sorts, to drunkenness, crime, and madness, to every abomination of the flesh and the soul, is a counterpart of the antique house of the Atrides; and, indeed, the study of hysteria, of mental diseases and affections of the nerves, is the modern source of the marvellous—the only marvellous that can exist in a scientific era.

Finally, what contributes greatly to distort the appearance of reality in M. Zola's novels is his literary method,—the method he employs habitually, and which consists of an accumulation of minute touches. By dint of piling up detail on

¹ "Germinal."

detail, image on metaphor, by adding to the terms of the colorist those borrowed from the vocabulary of music, he ends by producing the effect of something monstrous.

The *chef-d'œuvre* of this kind is undoubtedly the description of a fantastic garden, the *Paradov*, occupying a hundred and fifty pages; but there are other instances hardly less significant, such as the famous symphony in cheeses, or the following description of a crowd gathered round a picture in the Salon of the Rejected (*Salon des Refusés*): "He watched the throng, and listened to the tumult rising and swelling in an ascending scale of explosive laughter. From the doorway he could see the jaw-splitting grimaces of the visitors, their contracting eyes and swelling cheeks, and could hear the windy puffing of the stout men, and the rusty creaking of the thin ones, mingled with the shrill little pipings of the women. . . . The report of this droll picture having spread, there was a rush from the four corners of the salon, group after group pressing forward, elbowing each other, struggling to reach the front."¹

Or this of a children's lunch-party: "There were cakes in piles, pyramids of candied fruits, stacks of sandwiches, and lower down the table a symmetrical array of dishes filled with pastry and sweetmeats; there were cream puffs, *babas* and

¹ "L'œuvre."

*brioche*s, alternating with dry biscuits, cracknels, rout-cakes, and almond-cakes; there were jellies trembling in tall glasses, and bowls overflowing with cream, and finally little champagne bottles as high as your hand, proportioned to the size of the guests, flashed the lightning of their silver helmets around the table. It was like one of those gigantic feasts that children imagine in their dreams."¹

Thus even a little dinner for babies takes on gigantic dimensions when depicted by M. Zola!


And so under the influence of this magnifying vision, all beings and all things assume a uniform aspect, and one of uniform monstrosity.

This is indeed what constitutes M. Zola's real originality, and the distinguishing quality of his talent. He is a realist only in the sense in which those are called realists who see from preference the pettinesses of life and the ugly sides of humanity. He is not a poet—not even in the widest sense of the term; for he has not a spark of that imagination which creates souls and events. He has no fancy, and cannot raise himself above the earth. He is without true sensibility, although he can be sentimental on occasion. But he has a natural gift for inflating and magnifying everything. All material objects, and life itself, appear to him through a haze of hallucination.

¹ "Une Page d'Amour."

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A writer of vivid sensations, with a fummy and troubled brain, he has sought to be exclusively a painter of reality; and he has painted it in fact as he has seen it; that is, in a sort of perpetual nightmare.



ALPHONSE DAUDET.





ALPHONSE DAUDET.

IF we had the pen of the author of "Lettres de mon Moulin" ("Letters from my Windmill") we should have no hesitation in retelling once more the old legend of the fairies bending over the cradle of a new-born child: and this time they should all be bidden, so that not a single gift should be wanting to this god-child of the fairies, nor the homage of one sympathetic heart.

There are indeed few examples of a more fortunate career, or of a literary work that has so constantly disarmed criticism.

To please is a gift, but it is one that does not exist without the desire to please; and one of the leading traits of M. Daudet's physiognomy is the sort of natural coquetry which makes him wish to charm everybody, and be beloved by everybody. The admiration of a few, popularity with a small coterie, could never satisfy him. Not for him is the literature that addresses itself to the initiated only — what he mockingly calls "literature for the deaf." He knows, moreover, that, however much

an author may affect to hold himself aloof from and above the crowd, it is for the crowd that he writes, after all. As for himself, he repels no class of reader. He is clear and easily accessible, never tiresome, never coarse. He charms alike those who delight in the rush and stir of modern life, Parisians, and loungers on the Boulevards; dreamers to whom the real world is worth far less than the world of fancy; women who enjoy the luxury of tears; and all those good people who persist in regarding novel-reading as merely a superior kind of pastime — in short, the entire public is at his feet.

And it is his special good-fortune, that while winning such success with the general reader, he has been able to preserve the high esteem of the lettered and those of his own profession. The naturalist school has striven to enroll him in its ranks; and he has made no resistance, knowing that it is useful to have partisans who extol you, and not a bad thing to belong to a brotherhood, on condition of being a lay brother. But his naturalism differs on so many points from naturalism proper, that it is easy to perceive the writer is free from all the superstitions of the school. His theories are very broad; he would gladly appropriate to himself the beautiful words he puts in the mouth of the sculptor Védérine, who compares successive generations of artists to a fleet of boats



ALPHONSE DAUDET.



putting out before the wind under a threatening sky. "Truly I belong to my own boat, and I love it; but all those others setting sail, or entering port, are as dear to me as my own. I signal to them, I hail them, I try to hold communication with all; for all of us, whether leaders or followers, are threatened by the same dangers; for all our barks the currents are strong, the winds treacherous, and the night comes down so fast!"¹ He belongs indeed to no school; he has not even founded one. He has not made it his business to reform modern literature; and one of the most delightful things, in speaking about him, is that we are not forced to decipher the Sibylline books, nor to adopt the jargon of the literary theorizers.

There is not a tinge of pedantry in Daudet; nothing that betrays effort, or suggests the dogged labor of the professional author. He lets his subject take possession of him; he shows an affection for his characters, and a delight in his theme. He writes with a fever in his veins that is far from unpleasant; and a fiery haste that makes his pen fly, and sends a thrill to his finger-tips. In the exuberance of his nature, and overflowing as he is with the desire to spread his ideas abroad, and give them immediate shape, he acts and talks his scenes before writing them.

The book has been *lived*, and lived amidst the

¹ Daudet, "L'Immortel" ("The Immortal"), p. 310.

surroundings that suit it best, so that it seems to emerge from them spontaneously. It was in the solitude of a windmill engarlanded with wild vines and rosemary, that he wrote his first short stories, so steeped in the sunlight of Provence. "Fromont jeune" ("Sidonie") was composed in an old mansion in the Marais. "Les Rois en Exil" ("Kings in Exile") amid the decayed splendors of a once stately hotel of the Louis XIII. period.

This need for feeling the soul of things in unison with one's own thought is not the quality of a hack-writer, but of a poet. M. Daudet has the poet's nature; he has its enthusiasms and discouragements, all the nervous sensibilities, caprices, and impertinences, which we pardon in him as in a spoilt child; he has also the naïve sensitiveness and vanity which shrink from the slightest criticism.

The universal fascination exercised by M. Daudet's genius arises partly from the suppleness and versatility of his gifts. This poet has a keen sense of reality; this patient observer is visited by sudden flights of fancy. He has power of imagination as well as of vision. He enjoys, as well as other writers, painting in a brilliant stage-setting, sparkling with light and color; but the scenery with him does not overpower the drama, nor description take the place of analysis of character.

He has a curiosity about his personages and their sentiments; they move him by turns to anger and to mockery.

He has wit, but he has sensibility also, and his irony is blended with pity. Thus the most varied qualities combine in him, and temper one another. He is not one of those who have the defects of their qualities, or rather, who push their qualities to the point where they become defects. His talent is well-poised, finely balanced, harmonious. It is this that makes him so attractive, more attractive doubtless than strong; for his mockery is without gall, his melancholy has no depth of sadness, and it is the strongly drawn contrasts that make the powerful works. Originality and power result from the breaking up of this perfect equilibrium between the various faculties of the mind, so that one is developed at the expense of the rest, often to the verge of monstrosity.

M. Daudet has been congratulated on not letting himself be confined to some one overwhelming success. While Flaubert, to the world in general, is only the author of "Madame Bovary," M. Zola only the author of "L'Assommoir," each of us may have his special favorite among M. Daudet's works. For one he is the author of "Le Nabab" ("The Nabob"), for another of "Sappho;" others have gone on seeing in him

only the author of the "Contes." Now, this may perhaps result from the fact that there is not one of his books into which he has put his whole self; he has not produced one of those works upon which a writer concentrates all his best efforts, which sum up his genius, and make a date in literature. But why should we trouble our heads over quibbles like these? Why spoil our own pleasure, and run the risk of giving pain to *le petit Chose*?

I.

M. Alphonse Daudet was born at Nîmes in 1840. When a little less than eighteen years old, he set off for Paris to become an author. He brought with him a slender collection of manuscript poems full of freshness and daintiness; and it seemed to him in his Southern *naïveté* and confidence, that he had nothing better to do than to sing the praises of his beautiful South to the Parisians.

The "Letters from my Windmill" made their appearance in 1866. "Tartarin" and "L'Arlésienne" followed shortly. "Numa Roumestan" came later. We know what a prominent place the picture of the men and life of the South holds in M. Daudet's work. We find it even in those books where it is not the principal subject. Zansoulet the Nabob is from this same South.

and his mother, the active and frugal old peasant woman; and so is Elysée Méraut in "Kings in Exile," as well as Jean Gaussin and Uncle César in "Sappho." Reminiscences of this all-invading South reappear in episodes where we should least expect to encounter them. He has put them everywhere. No writer has made a more complete, successful, and final study of Southern life, at least of the Provençal South.

He has reproduced, in the first place, the scenery of that region in its true colors and exact outlines. He has shown us the clear landscape, with its narrow and graceful horizons, gladdened by pure breezes, perfumed with lavender, and vibrating with light; he has given us the poetry of a poor and meagre nature; above all, he has brought out the soul of that nature.

"L'Arlésienne" is a masterpiece in this respect. The farm with its stories of the shepherd who knows all the stars by their names, the babblings of the Innocent who is the safeguard of the house, the sheep-fold amid the reeds of the Camargue, the farandole unwinding its mazes to the sound of the rustic fife—all this forms a perfect setting for the idyl of the region. But the tragedy that breaks forth in this idyllic setting has a still stronger aroma of the soil. We see the young lad Frédéri bewitched as it were by the mere sight of this Arlesian girl, who is always

present in the drama, although she never appears in visible shape, and henceforth there is no help for him. In vain does he despise her and hate her; in vain does he feel beside him the devoted tenderness of little Arlette, ready and eager to save him. His Arlesian has cast a spell over him, and this spell will be his death; and the action sweeps along in a furious current—violent, inevitable. Thus at certain hours there passes over that peaceful landscape a feverish blast, a scorching fiery breath, the blast of the mistral destroying everything in its path, between two radiant smiles of the southern sky.

It remained for M. Daudet to incarnate the spirit of the South in a type which should sum up the instincts and temperament of the whole race; which should be the South in person, with the turn of mind belonging to it, the accent and gestures, the ways of thought, of feeling, and of imagination—imagination above all. He must show us this talkative South, expansive and benevolent, boastful and sincere, solemn and familiar, fiery as Don Quixote and prudent as Sancho Panza—this noisy, tumultuous South, wholly on the surface, all sound and show.

This type is realized in Tartarin. M. Daudet has drawn him with inimitable touches and singular felicity of expression. Who does not know the hero of Tarascon as well as if he had seen

him? And who, in fact, has not seen the redoubtable little man, with his good, placid face, in spite of the bristling beard and flashing eyes? The story of his exploits, and the description of the scenes that beheld them, have the bold relief of an epic. The house under the baobab; the hero's study hung round with poniards, blunderbusses, Carib arrows, and Malay Krisses; Tartarin returning from his performance in the duet from "Robert le Diable;" Tartarin and the famous cap-shooting parties; Tartarin among the *Teurs*; Tartarin hunting in company with the Prince of Montenegro, his return escorted by the camel which has seen him killing his lions; in short, all Tartarin's adventures are so many episodes of a history which henceforth belongs to mankind. They constitute a fund upon which all may draw. M. Daudet himself has set the example. He takes up from time to time the hero he has created, and shows him to us in fresh incarnations, — Tartarin the excursionist, Tartarin the founder of colonies — we might continue the series. And take note that M. Daudet stands almost alone in our day for his success in breathing the breath of life into one of these all-but-legendary heroes, whose face is familiar to all, whose character, once traced, remains the same, in whatever combination of circumstances we may please to place him.

Tartarin was sketched with a somewhat coarse

brush, with deliberately exaggerated strokes; but it was easy to reduce the figure of this hero of a burlesque epic to more human proportions. When Numa Roumestan appeared, the readers sought to discover which one among the conspicuous men of the South M. Daudet had attempted to bring upon the scene. They naturally thought of Gambetta, whom M. Daudet had known upon his first arrival in Paris, having lived near him in that hôtel du Sénat where Gambetta was wont to astonish the guests at the table d'hôte, and make the rafters ring with his eloquence. He had already appraised him in his "Lettres à un Absent" ("Letters to an Absent Friend"), where he described him as "the Table d'hôte Thunderer; that is to say, all that can be imagined most provincial, most sonorous, and most tiresome."

Nevertheless, the readers were wrong. Numa is no particular individual, no one Southerner more than another, not especially a native of Cahors, nor precisely of Nîmes or of Avignon. He is much more our old friend, the worthy Tarasconese hero, transported into another social sphere, promoted from his club to the Tribune of the Chamber of Deputies, from his modest house in the *Cours* to official salons; in short, a new incarnation of Tartarin, as Tartarin the minister. This time we are shown the reverse side of his nature and the wretchedness concealed beneath his tri-

umphant good fortune. We hear, in reply to his most joyous *tartarinades*, the echo: "Joy of the street, sorrow of his home." These amiable and faithless natures, light and cruel in their inconstancy, can cause such misery! But he is still recognizable by his effervescence, his intemperance of speech, his mania for making promises. It is the portrait, side by side with the caricature, one serving to verify the likeness of the other, — the counterproof of Tartarin.

In this painting of the South only a meridional could have succeeded, one who found in himself some of the symptoms he analyzed, and who was conscious of the South in his blood. This imprint of race — so often to be left out of the account — is strongly marked in M. Daudet. He is essentially a Latin. To the traditions of his race he owes that sentiment of form which he carries to such a high degree. He turned instinctively at first to a short but finished and elaborate style of composition, which enclosed a complete whole within a clear and concise outline. His first stories are miniatures, recalling the most precious specimens left to us by the art of an earlier day. Later, in his novels, he attempts to enlarge his manner; but he never succeeds entirely in breaking the narrow frame in which his thoughts had so long moved at ease. He knows well that chapters joined together do not constitute a book; but he

cannot help liking distinct episodes treated for themselves, short scenes skilfully conducted, variations strung upon his theme with a single word, returning again and again after the manner of a refrain.

He has also a taste for ingenious fashions of speech, for presenting his idea under a figurative and picturesque form.

In the first pages of "Sappho" occurs a scene where Jean Gaussin carries his mistress in his arms, — toiling up one long flight of stairs after another, growing more breathless and distressed with every flight, — which resumes in advance the whole story.

This love of form betrays him at times into trivial elegancies and prettinesses of style. Thus we find in his books magic keys that sound "*dring, dring,*" stage-coaches that talk, green top-coats that indulge in confidences; in short, a whole series of unmeaning fancies and finical allegories. Even in the most serious passages and amidst the most forcibly written pages, we come upon these tinkling notes which belittle and weaken the effect.

M. Daudet is a true child of the South also in the quality of his irony. "There is," he says, "a word in the language of the poet Mistral that sums up and defines clearly an instinct of the whole race; that is, *galéja*, to joke, to banter; and in hearing it we can see the flash of irony, the

malicious sparkle gleaming in the depths of Provençal eyes — and I, too, am a *galéjaïré*. Amid the fogs of Paris, bespattered by its mud and its sadness, I may have lost the taste and faculty of laughter; but in reading ‘Tartarin,’ any one may see that there remained in me a fund of gayety that suddenly blossomed forth in the brilliant sunlight of *down there*.”¹

It is not only in reading “Tartarin” that we perceive this naturally mocking tone which belongs to M. Daudet. Observation, with him, is always made up of mockery. He introduces his personages to us in a tone of mild banter; he holds himself aloof from them, and enjoys the spectacle of their follies, their foibles, and their manias, as well as of their hopes, illusions, and impotent struggles. We can easily distinguish the accent of derision in his way of repeating to us the “cruel words” of d’Argenton. There is mockery in the mere heading of the chapter, “She will not do so any more,” wherein he tells the story of the last moments of poor Désirée, who, still shivering with the chill of the water into which she has thrown herself, and already touched by the finger of death, promises M. the Commissary of Police that she will not do so any more. Recall, too, the persistency with which he applies the epithet of “the avenger” to Frantz Risler, who hastens home

¹ “Trente Ans de Paris” (“Thirty Years of Paris”), p. 149.

from Egypt to speak his mind to his erring sister-in-law, and only succeeds in making love to her. Recall the episode of the *fêtes* in honor of the Bey, at Saint-Romans — the whole village decked with flags, a theatrical entertainment organized, bands of music awaiting a signal to burst forth, all the speeches prepared and the authorities assembled upon the passage of the Bey's train — which passes, indeed, but does not stop! Recall a host of other scenes sketched in the same manner — so many *galéjades*! But, in truth, is not life itself a perpetual *galéjade*? We must observe also that in this Provençal raillery there is no trace either of the heaviness of German pleasantry, of the savageness of English humor, or of the cynicism of what is commonly termed Gallic gayety. This raillery is always indulgent and light.

This lightness, this smiling grace, have been the especial mark that distinguished M. Daudet's talent in this period of brutal literature. He sees, as well as others, the ugly side of life, but he stops short of the ignoble; he has taken pains to redeem his most merciless studies of life by charm of expression.

In "Sidonie," it is at the moment when the fatal day of reckoning is hastening on, with its *cortège* of crime and ruin, that he has chosen to tell us the legend of "the little man in blue." We may think the legend a trifle too smart to symbolize

that lugubrious thing: the distress caused by a gigantic failure; but this is to misunderstand one of the essential gifts of the Provençal imagination.

In the neighborhood of "Aps en Provence" you may have seen one of those desolate Southern landscapes, thinly sprinkled with stunted shrubs and tumble-down hovels — but let the sun of Provence gleam forth, and suddenly this melancholy scene becomes joyous and gay; so it is with M. Daudet's imagination; it has been gilded once for all by a sunbeam from his native South.

II.

But it happens that beneath this outward gaiety there is a background of sadness, and that this compatriot of Mistral is a younger brother of Dickens. This kinship of mind between M. Daudet and the English novelist has often been pointed out. I believe he has even been reproached with it; for there are always imbeciles enough to be found to accuse a writer of having copied his works from those of another.

To such as these M. Daudet makes the only suitable reply when he says: "That there are certain affinities of mind for which one is not responsible, and that on the day of the great creation of men and novelists, nature in a fit of abstraction may have mixed her materials."¹ He adds: "I

¹ "Thirty Years of Paris."

feel in my heart the love that Dickens felt for the poor and unfortunate, for childhood spent in the wretchedness of great cities. Like him I began life in a heartrending manner, obliged to earn my daily bread before I was sixteen years of age. That is, I believe, our greatest resemblance." The trials of this heartrending first experience of life we have learned to know well from the story, slightly touched by romance, which M. Daudet relates in the first half of "Le Petit Chose" ("Little What's-His-Name").

He is himself that Daniel Eyssette, whose parents are manufacturers in a Southern city. Hard times come on, and they are soon on the road to bankruptcy. Children understand or divine many things, and those who have early felt about them the heavy gloom of money anxieties are marked by it for life.

The family are at last forced to exchange the big house, with all its beloved nooks, for a small tenement in an obscure street of Lyons. The fogs of the dull city enter into the child's very soul. Furthermore, as the family resources keep on diminishing, and they become more straitened each day, Daniel is forced to earn his bread, and resigns himself to taking the place of usher in a great school, that most odious of all professions. He exercises his functions in the "prison-house of Alais," as he calls it, "amidst a throng of loud,

coarse peasant children." "A prey to all the persecutions of these little monsters, surrounded by bigots and vulgar pedants who despised me, I endured there all the degrading humiliations of poverty." No doubt this precocious experience of the cruelty of life developed M. Daudet's natural tendency to melancholy, and contributed to give him a deeper understanding of the suffering of others.

There were already in his earliest books stories wet with tears, and veiled in black, such as that of Bixiou, the old caricaturist, who has lost his sight, and whose portfolio is famous among his contemporaries, who imagine it to be stuffed with ferocious sketches, he himself having called it his bag of gall.

One day this famous bag of gall bursts open, and the papers which filled Bixiou's portfolio are scattered on the ground; and they are found to be his little girl's letters to her papa, his doctor's prescriptions, and a lock of hair marked, "Céline's hair, cut on the 13th of May." Such is what the sneering mask concealed; but the world had seen only the mask.

Even the gayety of Tartarin's adventures is not so very gay after all, when looked at closely; for Tartarin is the dupe of his imagination. When the day of disillusion comes, as come it must, the awakening will be strangely mournful. In fact, all M. Daudet's novels are sad. Pity for

every form of human suffering is their constant inspiration. There is nothing of the declamatory, romantic style about them, no theatrical despair, no anathemas hurled at creation or society. It is enough for M. Daudet to "follow all travellers along the way of life with tender pity, and to throw a friendly glance at all the stragglers from the road."¹

He makes no attempt to dissimulate this pity; he does not regard it as a weakness for which he has cause to blush. On the contrary, he allows it free utterance, and often intervenes personally in the narrative, mingling his own reflections with the events he is relating.

Thus when describing the death-bed of one of the great ones of the earth, he reflects how "the poor wretch who dies in a hospital without family or home, and with no name save the number of his pallet bed, accepts death as a deliverance — that we can understand. But here it is all so different. To have all, and be forced to resign all, what an overthrow!"²

Again, before the weakness of a senile lover he exclaims: "Eternal childishness of love! In spite of your twenty years in the courts of law, your fifteen years in the Tribune, in spite of being always sufficient master of yourself to preserve your *sang-froid* amid the most tumultuous sessions

¹ "Jack," I., 345. ² "Le Nabab" ("The Nabob"), p. 347.

and the most savage interruptions . . . yet when once passion takes hold upon you, you find yourself the weakest of the weak." ¹

He protests in his own name against the injustices which fate inflicts on his characters. He addresses them in words like these : " Alas, poor girl, you thought it was easy to escape from life, to disappear suddenly. You did not know " — ² or again : " Poor, mad girl, move she ever so slowly, she is sure to overtake that gay runaway, since he is her evil fate, from which none of us can escape ! " ³

He consoles his unfortunate heroes ; he pities them, and weeps over them.

All this is a formal contradiction, we perceive, to the famous dogma of the artist's impassibility. And in fact, by this very gift of sympathy, M. Daudet separates himself plainly from the impassible or hostile attitude of naturalism toward its creations.

Irony and pity — M. Daudet's whole nature is there ! Both these qualities serve him well in penetrating beneath the surface shows of life.

III.

It finally occurred to M. Daudet that he might, in the long run, weary the Parisians with his stories of Provence, and that it was time to inte-

¹ " Numa Roumestan," p. 156. ² " Sidonie," p. 249.

³ " L'Immortel," p. 330.

rest them in some work which should speak of things nearer to them and to their daily life. He was then living in the Marais; he had before his eyes the active industry of that mercantile quarter.

M. Daudet has the privilege in common with all poets, that inanimate things have a distinct physiognomy for him,—that they live, speak, and act.

The old houses revealed to him the tragedies of which they had been witnesses, their very echoes were alive to him. His imagination was kindled, and he immediately set to work to reconstitute the events of which this was the theatre; he was thus led to writing the drama of industrial Paris, having the manufactory for its centre.

The prosperous, substantial business-house solidly established on an honorable past, which is shaken little by little, and finally dragged to ruin, merely by the pressure of a woman's hand,—such is the subject of "*Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné*" ("Sidonie").

In this first of M. Daudet's longer novels, and the one that passes with many judges for his *chef-d'œuvre*, we find most of the themes he has taken up later, and the characters who form his usual list of *dramatis personæ*. Here also he inaugurates a system of composition quite his own, which consists in carrying on a sort of duplicate novel. Being persuaded that "in the complicated scheme

of modern society — that great tissue of interests and ambitions, of services accepted and rendered — the various classes are all brought into close relations, the highest existences mysteriously bound together with the lowest,"¹ he takes pains to place beside the spectacle of brilliant, worldly Paris, scenes of family life among the Parisian poor. Thus close by the opulent dwelling of the Fromonts and Rislers, he shows us the straitened home of the Delobelles, the hard toil of the two women, the infirmity and death of Désirée. We shall find them again, these Delobelles, in all M. Daudet's novels; in "The Nabob," their name is Joyeuse; Méraut in "The Kings in Exile;" Valmajour in "Numa Roumestan." They reappear in "L'Immortel" in the shape of the gentle Abel de Freydet and his paralytic sister. It sometimes happens that these two parts of the novel do not hold together very closely, and that the connecting link between them is barely perceptible.

"Jack" is the history of "Le Petit Chose" over again, but told in a more tragic tone, longer drawn out, and with a more loosely woven plot.

Up to this point M. Daudet had conceived of the novel of modern life only after the manner of his predecessors in fiction, as the story of unknown, obscure individuals, of whom history was not cognizant.

¹ "The Nabob," p. 503.

In "The Nabob" and "Kings in Exile" he attempts a new departure. He mingles with his more or less imaginary characters real personages, who have borne their part in contemporary society; he joins to the unknown of fiction some of the most illustrious actors in our political comedy.

This is what he calls "the novel of modern history," a sort of transposition of the old-fashioned historical novel. This style of work escapes the principal reproach that has been directed against its forerunner. That which makes the traditional historical novel essentially and brutally false is that the personages who figure in it are drawn by an author not their contemporary, whose soul is not formed like theirs, nor fashioned by the same surroundings, and who is therefore not entitled to inform us what impression the events of their time made on them, nor to reveal to us their hidden motives and inmost feelings.

There remains, even in the novel of modern history, a certain element of convention and fancy, but not exceeding the license that must be allowed to the artist. And it is only justice to recognize that M. Daudet has put into his novels all the history they will hold. His historical personages are good likenesses; they are taken in the attitude in which their contemporaries saw them, and which will survive.

When the author of "The Nabob" was hotly

accused of having taken an unfair advantage of his position near the Duc de Morny, he replied that there was no ground for charging him with slander, and that if the duke could have seen himself under the likeness of Mora, far from resenting it, he would have been grateful to the author. Possibly he was right. In any case, the individual portrait is of less importance than the picture of society.

“The Nabob” offers a very exact picture of social life in the last days of the Empire, — a feverish, over-wrought, jaded society, rousing itself to a sort of factitious activity, only to relapse and finally break down utterly, like Dr. Jenkins’s patients.

In “Kings in Exile” M. Daudet sets before our eyes one of the most poignant dramas of the Europe of to-day — one of those dramas at which we gaze with indifference, scarcely appreciating their depth or their wide bearing, from the absence of due perspective. It is the gradual wearing away of grandeur in exile, the pride of royalty breaking down by degrees under the disorder of broken habits, the anguish of hope deferred, of alternate expectancy and disappointment.

It is the dignity of royalty undermined by the *laissez-aller*, the elbowings in the street, the countless familiarities of foreign Bohemia. Here lies the real dethronement in this slow demoraliza-

tion, this abdication of one's self, the saddest of all abdications.

"The Evangelist" and "Sappho" testify to a serious effort in another direction. In these books M. Daudet sought to show that he was capable of creating, and of constructing from within, a work involving unity of purpose and a single inspiration. He has succeeded; the narrative of "The Evangelist" has a fine, bare outline, as stern and cold as the walls of a Protestant temple. "Sappho" has a strong, well-knit plot; and yet, of all M. Daudet's books, these two seem least to belong to him. In them he has followed with too much docility the naturalist processes in art and psychology.

"The Evangelist," which shows us a soul invaded by religious fanaticism, and its gradual "*dehumanization*," is a second *Madame Gervaisais*, with a Protestant environment. The type of fanatic represented by Mme. Autheman, that fatal woman who sows grief and death in her path, who drives men to hurl themselves in the track of a locomotive, who steals young girls away from their mothers, and pours out suspicious beverages for them to drink, is a monster, a bogey, one of those nightmare visions which our naturalists have treasured as their sole legacy from romanticism. The influence of the naturalist school is still more apparent in "Sappho." It betrays itself in the

choice of subject and in the characters it introduces to us.

Sappho is the daughter of a cab-driver; the Hettéma couple seem borrowed straight from a novel of M. Zola's, M. Hettéma having taken his wife from a house of ill-repute. Among the things the naturalists succeed best in describing are mental disorders and atrophy of the will; the characters they most revel in are the dull, the limp, the degenerate — those without moral force or power of resistance, the absolutely negative natures.

Jean Gaussin is one of these. He lets himself be taken possession of and held captive, sinking ever deeper and deeper into the slough of his irregular union, until he loses, one after the other, his fortune, his position, his personal dignity.

Another pretension of naturalism is that of being a school of ethics; it is solely for our warning and instruction that it unfolds the most debasing spectacles before our eyes. The author of "Sappho," who had hitherto troubled himself very little with indoctrinating his contemporaries, now invites them to take their share in this "frightful lesson." "For my sons, when they are twenty years of age" — such is the serious dedication, placed at the head of this book by M. Daudet, who is not usually given to that sort of bombast.

It is with great surprise we discover that this

novelist, who is the friend of all men, has one hatred in his heart. This writer without enemies was, it appears, all this time the enemy of forty other writers. He bore a grudge against the French Academy. He was nourishing toward that institution a violent yet stubborn wrath, and was preparing his revenge in the dark. He was patiently accumulating against it a stock of epigrams, of gossipy and derisive anecdotes, the most ancient and musty of which seemed to him sufficiently fresh for his purpose; even that of Suard the perpetual secretary coming to the *séance* of the 21st of January, 1793, and sweeping away all the votes. He had collected all the spiteful sayings about the rivalries of candidates, the intrigues in leading salons, the mischances of visits for soliciting votes, with gibes also at the absurdity of the costume, with its showy green embroideries, and deadly sword "with a trench in the blade for the effusion of blood." Finally in the pages of "L'Immortel" he vents all this accumulated rancor. Grotesque as it may seem, this book is in truth the product of hatred; and the proof is that it is in flat contradiction to the whole spirit and sentiment of M. Daudet's other works.

There is but one interesting character in "L'Immortel," and it is against him that the author vents his spite. If Astier-Réhu had not been a member of the Academy, what pains M. Daudet

would have taken to stir our pity for the fate of this modest, industrious man, so disinterested, confiding, and loyal. But Astier-Réhu inhabits the apartment of Villemain; that is enough, he has entirely forfeited our sympathy. M. Daudet accordingly does not spare him; he upbraids him for his hobbies and his virtues, for his books and collections, for being born in Auvergne, for his large appetite, and for his prominent jaw. He allows him to be deceived and mystified, and gives him over to ridicule and insult instead of pitying him—and all in sheer wrath.

Whence comes this vindictiveness? M. Daudet remarks bitterly that the members of the Academy are old—but that is surely not their fault—and that they are ugly—but that is no reason for bearing a grudge against people. Could it be owing to his rejection by the Academy? But he had only to present himself to be “of it.” And, indeed, we fail to see why he should have sworn such a mighty oath: “I do not present myself! I never have presented myself! I never will present myself!” He is not one of those literary men in sabots; one of those brutal irreconcilables who would overturn everything without regard to the proprieties. He would not be out of place in the “salon” of the Academy. Can it be that he is inconsolable for the exclusion of Balzac? . . . The truth is, he

would have been greatly at a loss himself to give a motive or a pretext for his attitude. We know that the Academy is not above reproach. It cannot bestow talent, nor does it invariably reward it. Nevertheless, it has its utility; we may even venture to assert that this venerable institution has never had greater reason for being than at the present day. In theory, academic honors are among those that are the reward neither of wealth nor of political influence; in this respect they stand alone. Whatever contradictions may have been given to this theory in practice, it is one that should be maintained. That is why the Academy has not lost all prestige. Doubtless it would be puerile to carry our respect for it to the point of superstition, but it is not less so to make war on it. To grow heated on either side is equally childish. Let me hasten to say that this little weakness on the part of M. Daudet does not altogether displease me.

We must add that M. Daudet has not yet finished his work.¹ We have much to expect from him in the future; especially if he will abandon his half-successes in writing for the stage, and return to the field which is truly his own.

¹ This article was published before M. Daudet's death.

IV.

All these novels of his are "true stories." M. Daudet relates to us only things that have happened. He borrows his incidents from the daily press, or, more frequently, from his personal reminiscences, or the experiences of his family and friends. All his characters have really existed, from Daniel Eyssette, who is M. Alphonse Daudet, and "Ma Mère Jacques," who is his brother Ernest, to M. Astier-Réhu and the bookbinder Albin Fage.

Jack related his heart-breaking Odyssey to his future biographer; d'Argenton attitudinized before him; Dr. Rivals was his physician; Belisaire was his comrade in the 6th company of the 96th, his real name being Offœhmer; Brigadier Mangin was simply named Brigadier Mangin. For M. Daudet carries his scrupulousness of detail so far in some instances as to preserve the real names of his models. To see themselves transported bodily into a printed book, with their tricks of speech and gesture, an exact description of their persons and even their proper names, may doubtless seem an unkind proceeding to those who have unconsciously figured as models to M. Daudet. But what of that? "By my delineation of old Gardinois," confesses M. Daudet, "I have given pain to one for whom I have a sincere affection; but I

could not suppress that type of an egotistical and terrible old man." There is nothing more to be said. Every one living within the novelist's circle must be aware that he is only there in order to serve him in the capacity of a model. . . . Such is his method of work. As a painter has his sketch-books, so he has his collection of little note-books, in which he jots down what will serve to recall a face, a gesture, an intonation. These are materials for the future work; later he weaves them together and combines them. With him to invent is to remember.

This method seems so easy at the first glance that there were naturally no lack of novelists in distress who sought to appropriate it. Following in M. Daudet's footsteps, writers of fiction began taking notes furiously. They then proceeded to publish them all, without choice or distinction — the most insignificant and the most scandalous alike. They perpetrated their little vilenesses in the name of the higher interests of art, but happily without evil effect, because the authors were without talent.

The method, in fact, is worth nothing in itself, unless one knows how to employ it. M. Daudet can, at need, recall this truth to those who are tempted to overlook it. "In the hands of imbeciles," he says, "the most curious archives have no more significance than the boasted 'human

document' has when used by a stupid novelist. It is the old story of the gold piece changed into a yellow leaf." The difficulty is not in having Daudet's note-books, it is in extracting from them books like his.

This method implies, in the first place, eyes to see, and the ability to use them. This is not common. For not only have we all known a Delobelle, while M. Daudet alone has been able to paint him, but it may be that we only perceive the foibles of the real Delobelle because we have seen them analyzed by the master.

The method involves also the power of setting forth the traits of character we have collected. We all remember Delobelle's speech while following his daughter's coffin to the grave. The comedian is sincerely moved; and it is with tears in his voice that he says to his neighbor, "Did you see — did you — two private carriages?" This speech is quite perfect; but it is because it sums up a whole character, a life devoted to appearances, and because it is significant of the ruling passion of an entire class.

In short, it is indispensable to the use of the human document to have the art of developing all it contains. The mere dry seeds must be submitted to the slow ripening process that shall fertilize them. We can judge by the example of M. Daudet himself the importance of this process.

Several of his novels were originally short stories. When we see through how many transformations the original work has passed, and how many elements it has accumulated from without, we readily perceive that this method of composition demands from its author no less personal effort than any other system. To copy reality requires imagination.

The only thing we need bear in mind in regard to M. Daudet's methods of composition, for the light it throws on the general tendency of his work, is this: that in his study of the society of his time, he does not set out from any abstract idea; it is not for the purpose of verifying a moral conception or a social theory that he is led to observe mankind. He has no theories to maintain, he agitates no problems; he does not declaim upon the condition of woman in modern society, nor upon the supreme importance of the financial question; he may even be said to have no general conception of life.

Without preconceived plan, therefore, he places himself directly in presence of living realities. He recalls somewhere a hobby he had when a child. "When only ten years of age, I was already haunted at times by the desire to lose my own personality, and incarnate myself in other beings; the mania was already laying hold of me for observing and analyzing, and my chief amusement

during my walks was to pick out some passer-by, and to follow him all over Lyons, through all his idle strollings or busy occupations, striving to identify myself with his life, and to enter into his innermost thoughts."¹

This practice he continued to follow. He chose such and such an individual, attached himself to him, and never let go until he had penetrated into the inmost recesses of his intellectual and emotional being, until he had taken complete possession of him, — his instincts, his acquired habits, his ambitions, cares, joys, and griefs. He looked also at the society before his eyes, and sought to reproduce its outer aspect, its strange and peculiar manifestations.

v.

It is thus that he has drawn a picture of "Parisian Manners." He is, in truth, neither the historian of the bourgeoisie in particular, nor of fashionable society, nor of the artistic world. What he has sketched is the way in which these worlds all blend to form a great composite, which is different from them all, and is essentially the world of Paris.

In his novels, Paris is not a mere setting for adventures that might happen just as well at Quimper. We cannot even conceive of "The

¹ "Trente Ans de Paris" ("Thirty Years of Paris"), p. 79.

Nabob" or "Kings in Exile," without this particular setting. Could the tragedy of "The Evangelist" take place anywhere else? Certainly it could nowhere have been so well placed as in this Paris, — the city of material interests and pleasures, but the city of mysticism as well.

The plot of "Sappho" would be possible nowhere but in Paris, one of whose special products is the girl of Sappho's class, refined by her varied surroundings, and who has acquired in the course of her travels a certain polish in expression, clever mots, and even ideas. We have here a sketch of manners drawn from close observation of Paris and what it offers that is most Parisian.

What is especially characteristic of this Parisian world is its motley aspect. M. Daudet remarks that Paris, in its very appearance, is like a card of samples of the entire world.

The narrow streets of the Marais recall ancient Heidelberg; the Faubourg St.-Honoré, in the vicinity of the Russian church, evokes memories of a quarter of Moscow; there are thronged and picturesque corners of Montmartre that are purely Algerian; while between Neuilly and the Champs-Élysées there are neat rows of small, low-studded houses that suggest an English town; and the streets adjoining St.-Sulpice seem detached from some ecclesiastical provincial city.

All this is still more true of the population,

which presents specimens of all races, all ranks, and all fortunes, of every social and moral variety.

It is only in Paris that a "Little Chèbe" could become Madame Risler, or a Colette Sauvadan be transformed into a Princess of Rosen. It is only in Paris that we encounter Serene Highnesses running to catch an omnibus. Here we see colossal fortunes made, heaven knows how, and flung out of the windows in the course of a few short weeks. Here we have nabobs whose mothers are old peasant women living in the country, and rising at dawn to chaffer over a farthing with their one maid. Here one may meet the son of a junk-dealer seated at the gaming-table opposite the first personage in the state. Here we have quondam ballet-dancers steeped in bourgeoisie; great artists who are great courtesans; scientists with the bearing of apostles and the morals of a Tartufe; gentlemen miraculously escaped from the hands of justice, who cut a great figure in the gay world; marquises who dine only at the side-table of houses to which they are invited; left-handed couples who are received everywhere; philanthropic societies for the benefit of the deceased; and financial institutions luxuriously appointed whose monumental safe contains nothing but the porter's bills. . . .

"There is but one Paris where we see sights like these," sagely remarks the *naïf* Passajou,

former usher to the Faculté des Lettres of Dijon ; at all events, there is only one Paris where such sights appear quite commonplace, and nobody is surprised at them ; and they are all to be found within the pages of "The Nabob." We could draw in this way from any of M. Daudet's books a fine collection of peculiar customs with a pronounced local flavor.

The result of this admixture of classes, this inversion of ranks, and complexity of social relations, is to produce incessantly the most startling changes of fortune, the most unlooked-for reverses and cataclysms. Melodrama is the normal condition of Parisian life ; it flows in a current just below the polished surface.

Recall the meeting of Monpavon and Mme. Jenkins, both going to their death, one with the correct bearing of a gentleman, the other with all the graces of a pretty woman. "Never could one have suspected from seeing their interchange of polished courtesies at this brilliant springtime *fête*, that the same sinister purpose was leading these two promenaders, thus meeting by chance as they travel their opposite roads to the same end."¹ Of these dramas a few come to the surface, gratifying popular curiosity for a time, and furnishing food for gossip and a subject of conversation. But how many silent tragedies acted

¹ "The Nabob," p. 452.

under the rose, obscurely and without witnesses, does Paris improvise from day to day! "It is this, perhaps, that gives to the air we breathe there that vibration, that thrill, which stimulates the nerves of us all."¹

It is this vibration, this thrill, something agitated, restless, threatening in the air, which constitutes the special atmosphere of Paris, that M. Daudet excels in reproducing; and it is in this atmosphere that his personages naturally move.

VI.

Whether these personages ever lived, whether they were real beings of flesh and blood, matters little; it is certain that they live in M. Daudet's novels. He has the gift of life. Probably he owes it in a great measure to his method of patient, minute observation, the observation of a short-sighted man, that fastens upon details. It is through this that he succeeds in catching those traits which distinguish an individual, and make him himself and no one else. He takes note of those infinite nothings that reveal a whole character.

Take for example: "With a *k*, Father Superior, with a *k*. The name is spelt and pronounced as in English — like this: Djack." In her anxiety lest this letter should be omitted

¹ "The Nabob," p. 450.

from her Jack's name, which gives it a stamp of English elegance, Ida de Barancey betrays at the first glance the futility of her poor shallow brain — her birdlike nature, fickle and volatile, incapable of retaining any impression, laughing and crying at the same moment, loving her son with an affection that is genuine in its way, and yet so easily leaving that son to die in a hospital.

Sidonie, that sister of Mme. Bovary and of Séraphine Pommeau, has more individual truth to life than either. With nothing of the romantic or sentimental in her turn of mind, free alike from the sway of the senses and from real love, dreaming only dreams of vanity and ambition, thirsting only for luxury, she remains through everything, and to the very end, a true *gamine* of Paris. She has all the evil instincts of her kind, — the venal soul, the feverish envy, the withered heart. She is coldly vicious and naturally false — false even in her prettiness, in her sophisticated grace, and her elegance as factitious and frail as an imitation pearl.

Then we have a Christian of Illyria, a fine sketch in profile of an ardent, indolent Slav, a king who has descended to bearing the nickname of "Rigolo," a grown-up child; Mora, the man of the world, "an impromptu statesman of the first rank, who had attained that position merely through his social qualities, his art of listening

and smiling, his knowledge of men, his *sang-froid* and scepticism, his skill in treating futile things seriously and serious things lightly ;” and Jansoulet, the simple-hearted pirate ; and the Levantine woman, a shapeless heap among her cushions, brutalized by Turkish tobacco, bloated with idleness and pride, never forgetting that she was a demoiselle Afchin ! And many more there are, whom we should recognize at any distance simply by their outline or the sound of their voice.

In the creations of art, individual life is only the first step ; there is another to which the personages of fiction rarely attain ; that is, the collective life, so to speak, by which an individual becomes the representative of a whole class of analogous beings. M. Daudet has expressed it well : “The truest joy of the novelist must always be to create beings, to set on their feet actual types of humanity, who, from their truth to nature, will henceforth be known to the world by the name, the gestures, the expressions, he has given them ; who will be talked about without reference to their creator, and without so much as mentioning his name. For my part, my emotion is always the same when, *à propos* of some passer-by, one of the thousand puppets of our human comedy, political, social, or artistic, I hear it said : ‘He is a Tartarin, a Monpavon, a Delobelle ! a thrill runs through me then, the proud thrill of a father

hidden among the crowd who applaud his son, and who, all the time, is longing to cry out: 'That is my boy!'"¹

M. Daudet understands it well. It is his highest honor that among these types of humanity — even though of a somewhat limited humanity — three or four are his boys.

Tartarin first of all; then Monpavon with his. "Deportment, deuce take it! we must have deportment;" above all, the illustrious Delobelle. In this grandiose type of the third-rate actor, M. Daudet has incarnated every foible, every absurdity, every pretension, common to theatrical people.

Delobelle is only a would-be comedian; but we well know that though every stage-struck person may not be a comedian, yet whoever has once approached the footlights is henceforth marked with the ineffaceable theatrical stamp. It is impossible for him to re-enter the current of ordinary life. There lingers about him something from the *rôles* he has played, which mingles with his most genuine sentiments, giving them a false and unnatural tinge. It becomes a necessity of his nature to pose.

Delobelle poses as the victim of persecution. He has enemies, whom he does not specify, who for fifteen years have been blocking his way to the stage. But he does not give up — he waits.

¹ "Thirty Years of Paris," p. 156.

he hopes, he has confidence in the future. He keeps his gaze perpetually fixed on his chimera, his dream of some day playing a great rôle or becoming stage-manager. He wrestles with fate therefore; he shows himself on the boulevards, in the *cafés*, well dressed, beaming with health, thriving upon his idleness — this is his idea of wrestling. Meanwhile his wife and daughter are killing themselves with hard work to support this idleness. He knows it, but he feels no remorse; and yet he loves his two victims, he means to be a kind husband and father. But here, again, he is the dupe of his illusions; he is persuaded that the efforts, the privations, of his wife and daughter are endured, not on his behalf, but for the sake of that mysterious genius of which he regards himself as the depository, — of that sacred fetish — art, of which the Delobelles are the ridiculous pontiffs.

What the stage is to Delobelle, literature is in an equal degree to the Vicomte Amaury d'Argenton. He is steeped to the marrow in literary conventionalities. From the Henri II. chair in which he carries on his tiresome maunderings, to the lyre which he suspends from the roof of his little house (*"parva domus, magna quies"*), all about him shows the influence of false ideals of art. He is a lyric rhymester with an Olympian brow and a cruel blue-gray eye, a self-satisfied egotist as fatal as Werther; and having a mistress

whom he christens Charlotte, and being *almost* the author of "A Daughter of Faust," he is a Goethe without the genius, and completely deceives himself.

Delobelle was exhibited to us detached from his natural environment; and in fact he was so perfect of his kind that he could stand alone. In the portrait of d'Argenton, on the other hand, the accessories are as important as the central figure. It is an undeniable fact that Failures gravitate naturally toward each other; there are secret affinities between them; they feel the need of making common cause in their spite against mankind, and of calling to the aid of their individual impotence the benefits of belonging to a clique.

Thus around d'Argenton, the poetical Failure, gather the charlatan Dr. Hirsch, a Failure in medicine; Labassindre, a musical Failure; and Moronval the mulatto, a Failure in various careers. Behind these are a host of others, and behind them others still. They flock together, at the beck of we know not what mysterious messenger, whenever a literary "event" takes place, the founding of a new review, or some manifestation in art. And we are amazed to discover how numerous they are, society not being in the habit of counting up those whom she leaves behind in her onward progress. They emerge from every

nook and corner of the faubourgs; they descend from all the adjacent heights, — Batignolles, Montmartre, Montparnasse, the Mount Aventines of Bohemia. They resort in a dismal procession to the literary receptions of the Gymnase Moronval. M. Daudet installs this Gymnase in the very centre of the Champs-Élysées; and it is a clever touch thus to locate the Failures and their Institute in the very heart of that refined civilization of which they are one of the products, since they are its refuse. M. Daudet has no equal as the historian of Failures.

VII.

He has undertaken to be also the historian of the poor. He has looked with the eye of a friend on the humble, the disinherited, all those disdained by literature as well as by life, on the silent and resigned, all who suffer without complaint, and give an example of single-hearted devotion.

To discern the interest in these lowly lives, to hear the cry of these silent hearts, demands true delicacy of feeling; and evidences of such feeling are not rare in M. Daudet's books. Here is a touching example, borrowed from the story of Désirée's death: "The doctors called the disease of which she was dying pneumonia, brought in her wet garments from the river; but the doctors were mistaken. Was she, then, dying of a broken

heart? No; for since that terrible night she had thought no more of Frantz, she no longer felt herself worthy of loving or of being loved. She was dying simply of shame. In the long night of delirium, she kept ceaselessly repeating: "I am so ashamed! so ashamed!"

Is not that an exquisite touch? Again, I know few more touching sketches of women than those of Claire Fromont with her perfect loyalty, and Rosalie Roumestan with her absolute sincerity. They both belong to the order of women who pass through life unnoticed; choice natures which we are apt to call colorless, and whose charm is too often unrecognized for lack of some kindred nature worthy to understand them.

It is unfortunate that sensibility is so nearly akin to sentimentality. M. Daudet has not always escaped this latter pitfall; indeed, I fear he has not always tried. He is too fond of dwelling on neglected childhoods like that of Jack, or on the slow torture of a child's heart like that of the little King Mâdou. He has even drawn children in the cradle who refused their mother's milk, and has forced us to listen to their wails of woe. He loves to harrow our feelings with pictures of crippled and consumptive young girls, of sick-beds and death-beds, of suicides and funerals without number. But pathos of this kind is too simple a resource, its effect is too sure. Tears are so

sacred that it is well for us to be sparing of them, and we have the right to protest and to defend ourselves when we perceive that too obvious a snare is being laid to catch our pity.

It is to be regretted also that whenever M. Daudet brings good people on the scene, they are unconsciously marked with the stamp of conventional goodness, and of the virtue that wins medals from the Humane Society.

Whether it be the worthy Dr. Rivals or the good homespun Belisaire, their benevolence is too perfect and too monotonous; we long to pick a flaw in it. The loyalty of the good Duke of Rosen, the chivalry of Elysée Méraut, are types one has already met, and in books more frequently than in life. We suspect the author of having fabricated these models of grandeur of soul, and we are a little distrustful of them.

We must add, however, that M. Daudet has more than once touched the true chord. The fireside of the Joyeuse family — though there may perhaps be rather too many blond curls bending around the evening lamp — is painted in discreet tones. The old man Joyeuse, having lost the situation by which he supported the household, dares not confess this great misfortune to his daughters; so each morning he sallies forth, tramps the Paris streets in search of employment, and in the evening invents stories about the "office" to which he

no longer goes. This is a heroism worth another, and has even the advantage over many more famous forms of heroism, that it is not heightened by romantic surroundings, and is more available in every-day life.

The modest home where the Cashier Sigismond Planus grows old beside "Mlle. Planus, my sister;" that in which Mlle. Ebsen lives with her daughter and her old grandmother; and that one where Lorie-Dufresne, the prefect out of place, is left stranded with his motherless children, — all these represent the courageous family life of Paris, of which reporters and newspaper men have nothing to say, but which may well tempt the novelist.

In these homes, struggles for existence are going on, quite as interesting perhaps as the stratagems resorted to by ingenious scamps to win heiresses and their fortunes. They should be related without any tone of forced commiseration, as the story of simple people ought to be simply told. But the novel of to-day concerns itself only with exceptional destinies. It insists upon looking up or down, either too high or too low. As if commonplace lives held only commonplace joys and sorrows, and only the *élite* had a right to live again in art!

Perhaps it is in his efforts to write the literature of the humble that M. Daudet has struck out into the newest paths. In truth, the farther we

go in the study of M. Daudet's works, the more we realize our love for them. In place of the strength that may be somewhat lacking, there is so much wit and grace and tender emotion!

They are the work of an artist, — a writer enamoured of the word that paints and of the melody of prose, but who understands also that art cannot be an end in itself, and that it has value only through what it expresses; of a man who has kept something of the vision of his childhood, knowing that childish eyes have a freshness of outlook which others lack; of an observer amused by the spectacle of his time, and who has reproduced the most characteristic social phases of that time.

There are tears and smiles in his work, as there are in life: and it may be fairly said that, of all the novelists of his group, M. Daudet is the one who has put into his work the greatest number of lifelike silhouettes, and even of full-length figures.

Life, as he knows it, is sad, full of disappointment, bitterness, and suffering: and yet the conclusion he draws from experience is that this life, with all its sadness, is well worth living. I find more sound sense and a deeper import in this conclusion than in the sullen attitude of renouncement of the pessimist, or the cowardly "*à quoi bon*" of the disenchanted. . . .


And who knows but one day, when time has

done justice to reputations that are now set too high, and when noisier voices are hushed, leaving no echo behind — who knows but we may then hear, rising above the ruins of so much that was ambitious and vain, the clear note of the cicada that came to us from “over there.” — from the sunlit shores of Provence?



M. PAUL BOURGET.





M. PAUL BOURGET.

A WRITER'S reputation is apt to be made in spite of his solid merits. He is admired for his most superficial qualities and his most amiable defects, and it is these that make him the fashion. The affectation of laying his scenes in aristocratic circles, and a certain finical sentiment, together with real delicacy of form, have won for M. Paul Bourget his success as a society novelist and a moralist of the salons; and yet it is from this point of view that his work is most open to criticism.

M. Bourget possesses hardly one of the qualities that make the society novelist. He has a somewhat awe-struck admiration for the elegancies of life, which is the reverse of real elegance; but he has no lightness of touch, and has never been able to rid himself of his scholastic habits and a professorial cast of mind.

He has a sort of wearisome persistency, which never permits him to take up a subject without dwelling on it until he has exhausted the ques-

tion, hence there are tiresome prolixities in all his books. His is not the charming art that plays over the surface of things: he lacks frivolity, and he lacks wit.

We should not think of remarking upon these deficiencies, were it not that he is sometimes pleased to enhance his narrative with playful touches; and at such moments venerable jokes out of the literary *Ana*, and the verbal slips and blunders of the illiterate — what we call "*les cuirs*" — seem to him in the best possible taste. It is where he assumes a light and *déagagé* air that we perceive most clearly what his real order of mind is. He has the somewhat ponderous intellect of the conscientious and painstaking worker, the gravity, if not the authority, of the moralist; and his real merit consists in having added, by the mental philosopher's method and processes, a new chapter to our knowledge of the human soul.

I.

Whoever adopts literature as a profession — unless driven to do so by the most puerile vanity — is led by the hope of satisfying some especial need of his own mind. He either seeks to prolong his dreams, and make them more real by giving them expression, or he wishes to assuage his griefs by pouring them forth, or to spread his ideas, to give warning, comfort, and counsel. For



PAUL BOURGET.



this a man becomes a novelist, a poet, or a moralist. In M. Bourget's case, the prompting to authorship came from his curiosity in regard to all that concerns the inner life.

We are familiar enough with the outward manifestations of human activity; the varied play of interests and ambitions, the pursuit of fortune or professional distinction; in short, all that makes up our social life, and involves only the coarser part of our nature. But this is merely the surface of life. What is there beneath and beyond it?

We live in the midst of men whom we call our fellow-creatures, who have the same faculties as ourselves, and are born into the same era of humanity. We see them act, we hear them speak, we judge them, and pronounce them intelligent, honest, or the reverse. But at the moment of pronouncing such judgments we are conscious how worthless they are, and how destitute we are of the necessary data on which to base them. Behind this man who carries on his business, brings up his family, and holds a position in society, what moral being is hidden? He has a heart; what thrill is awakened in it by his contact with life? What traces have dead illusions and shattered hopes left upon it? What is the nature of the feeling that love kindles within him? Under what guise does duty appear to him? What clouds have obscured his notions

of right and wrong? To what compromises has his conscience lent itself? Has he will-power? What motives actuate his conduct? What obscure processes are going on in those secret recesses of his being where the personality dwells? This is what escapes us, and what it would interest us so deeply to know, since it is the inner life which gives savor and value to the whole.

This curiosity may lead, with certain minds, to a profound disquiet, an almost intolerable anguish. . . . All who have loved know this torment, so common, yet so cruel. We have all known what it is to have close beside us a being whom we love, and to feel that though this beloved being is ours, some mystery in their nature forever eludes us — that it is vain for us to seek to penetrate the secret lurking behind that brow, or to solve the enigma of personality!

A torture similar to this is experienced by all who are gifted in an eminent degree with psychological curiosity, and a taste for looking into the souls of others.

And yet we know, all the while, that there exist certain psychical laws, and that problems of this order, as well as others, admit of a solution by those who possess the required data. Hence arises the desire of creating beings in our own likeness, of making them live and seeing them live, of animating them with sentiments like our own, and

studying in them the development, the progress, the perversions, and the infinite transformations of these sentiments.

In order to penetrate into the secret places of the contemporary soul, M. Bourget first sought information from books. This is doubtless a source of knowledge that cannot be neglected. In an era of advanced culture like ours, and for the most distinguished minds among us, the printed volume is a potent instructor. No one of us would be quite the same man if a certain book had not fallen under our eyes at a certain moment. All of us think the thoughts of others more than our own.

His books having revealed to M. Bourget that one of the marked traits of the contemporary soul is cosmopolitanism, he next set forth conscientiously upon his travels. He did not content himself with the superficial impressions of the tourist, but made long sojourns in England, in Scotland, in Italy, and in Spain; he strove to accommodate himself to new surroundings, in order to experience fresh sensations, to enrich and enlighten his mind.

But travelling, after all, only satisfies a vain curiosity. Cosmopolitanism may be a chance for the idle to cheat their ennui by dragging it about under other skies; it is not a method of investigation for the moralist. Neither in six months nor

in six years can one reach the essential part of a stranger's soul. The diversity of race subsists under apparent uniformity of costumes and customs, and it is vain for nations long separated to be brought together again; they remain unintelligible to one another. It took M. Bourget some time to make this discovery, but such is his final conclusion.

All that he brought back from his sojourns in foreign lands was a conviction of the inutility of such sojourns. . . . He still forced himself, however, to go into "society;" he endured the conversation of club-men and sporting-men; he received the confidences of women. . . . But that which goes by the name of fashionable society is the most empty of all modes of existence, a sort of community, in which we throw all our frivolities and all our hypocrisies into the common stock. It is accordingly there that genuine humanity is least apt to be found. To frequent gay society may be a pardonable form of childishness in an artist, provided he does not carry the folly to scandalous lengths, and has the discretion to retire from it before he has caught the irresistible contagion of frivolity.

But for the writer who wishes to instruct himself in the science of humanity, there is no greater delusion than that which consists in scattering his observations over a great variety of social spec-

tacles. The truth about human nature is not to be picked up in salons or sleeping-cars.

The best course, therefore, is to take one's stand in that corner of the world and that station of life where destiny has placed us, and to look within ourselves. A man's own experience suffices in the place of universal experience, if he knows how to read it rightly.

When we recall those who have uttered the profoundest truths about humanity, we are surprised to find how little they owe to intercourse with men. This is because a writer carries his conception of life within him, and traces from it the image he presents in his books. Everything depends on his own intellectual outfit, his cast of mind, and the nature of his sensibilities.

II.

The first thing that strikes us in this psychologist who has brought dilettantism into fashion, this novelist dear to women, is the vigor of his mind. He takes delight in thought — pure, abstract thought.

Among the men whom he acknowledges as his masters, the one who has exerted the profoundest influence over his mind is a philosopher, and one of the most austere thinkers of this period, — Hippolyte Taine.

Accordingly, among the writers of to-day —

philosophers by profession not excepted — we cannot name one who brings such sureness and precision to the expression of abstract ideas. Certain pages of "The Disciple" might suffice as an example. They denote in the writer the habit of moving freely amid systems and abstractions; they give evidence, not of that superficial curiosity so common among men of letters to-day, but of a rare aptitude for penetrating the thought of others, and for evolving the essential principles of a doctrine, and the soul of life that it contains.

His "Essays in Psychology" are among the books of the day which show the profoundest and most far-reaching observation of modern conditions of our moral life. Whatever he may do in the future, M. Bourget will remain pre-eminently the author of these essays; by this I mean that he will not conceive of the novel as the story of a particular life or of individual feelings. With him the narrative is merely the illustration of an idea, and each one of his books was written for the purpose of bringing to light some universal fact or some law of the emotions. He has a grasp of general ideas, — that tendency of the mind which links every fact with the series of facts that lead up to it, and sees every phenomenon in connection with its ultimate causes. He has all the rigor of the philosophic mind, proceeding readily by deductions, and not shrinking from the ped-

antry of an array of logic. He has also the philosopher's courage, which consists in carrying his ideas to their ultimate conclusion, even to the point where a conclusion may seem to involve a contradiction.

It is not necessary to look very closely to perceive that, within a few years, M. Bourget's thought has been profoundly modified. Starting with a sort of idle scepticism, his opinions have evolved in the direction of a more and more positive belief, nearly akin to Christianity. He thus gives evidence of earnest, vigorous, active thought.

It is our sensibility that determines the choice of our ideas. M. Bourget's sensibility is not only very acute, it is so to a painful and morbid degree. He has great tenderness, and was one of the first to break the spell of aridity which has prevailed in our literature for the past thirty years. There is not a trace in his writings of that irony which is a sign of hardness of nature. All his characters — those, at least, who are most akin to him — have one trait in common: extreme acuteness of feeling, a vivid impressionability; they have hearts on which the lightest touch inflicts a wound.

A study of the special characteristics of M. Bourget's style throws further light on this point. With all his exactness of detail, he has an easy, flowing style. Each term is precise; but the phrases have a mellow softness of outline, a delib-

erate movement, something languishing and tender in their cadence. The music of this style is continuously plaintive.

In fact, this alliance of a vigorous intellectual grasp with acute sensibility results inevitably in a tendency to sadness. Clear-sighted spirits are not necessarily sad; they accept the general order of things, and the pleasure of feeling that they are not dupes is enough for them. Knowledge is more than a consolation to them; it is a delight. Nor are the tender-hearted inevitably melancholy; being romantic and optimistic, they gladly follow the bent of their feelings, and make the world over according to their heart's desire. And melancholy, as we know, has many causes beside psychological ones; but one of the surest is this: the combination of a tender heart and a mind stripped of illusions. For one who does not hate mankind, the spectacle of the fatalities of our mortal lot leads to inevitable suffering.

M. Bourget finally has another quality, without which a large part of his work would remain inexplicable: that is, a certain licentiousness of imagination. He has himself dwelt upon this trait too frankly for us to hesitate about pointing it out.

Recalling a coarse epithet which Augier applied to him on the occasion of the *Prix Montyon* (prize of virtue) being awarded to one of his books, he speaks of the *naïf* despair this epithet caused him,

as to a writer "chaste in his life, and daring with his pen." This protest was unnecessary, and was considered so at the time. But it is nevertheless true that one characteristic of the closing eighteenth century reappears in his work, and we can easily see whence it comes. Stendhal grew up in those closing years of the eighteenth century; Laclos belonged to them; and it is hardly too much to say that Laclos's famous book has been a sort of breviary to M. Bourget.

There is not one of his novels in which we could not point out traces of "Les Liaisons Dangereuses;" some of them are merely a transposition of its plot. His *blasé* men of the world are own brothers to Valmont. "Cruelle Enigme" and "Crime d'Amour" tell one and the same story of a dangerous *liaison*, the rôles being simply interchanged in the two books. The attraction that draws Casal toward Mme. de Tillières in "Cœur de Femme" is the same which made the rake in the "Liaisons" desire the love of a *dévoté*. In "Sensations d'Italie," the most eloquent pages, not even excepting those devoted to St. Francis of Assisi, are the pages in which M. Bourget sings the praises of Laclos. And in spite of all he may assert as to the "morality" of that book and his plea for the reversal of a literary verdict in its case, in spite of his somewhat shuffling and embarrassed attempt at its rehabilitation, it remains true that

“*Les Liaisons Dangereuses*” is a coldly and deliberately licentious book, in which depravity does not even borrow the cloak of sentiment. Moreover, M. Bourget has plainly shown in his study of Baudelaire, and in the least insignificant poems of his “*Vie Inquiète*,” how easily licentiousness of imagination can be combined with mysticism. It even happens that among M. Bourget’s works there is one entirely in this vein; that is, his “*Psychology of Modern Love*,” one of the most objectionable books I know, less displeasing by the nature of its subjects even, than by an affectation of the *esprit-fort* amounting to puerility. But after all, the tendency is never quite absent from any of M. Bourget’s books, and it is this which gives them a dangerous quality. A vigorous mind, a morbid sensibility, a licentious imagination, — these are the characteristics which M. Bourget brings to bear upon the study of those problems of the soul which stir him with a noble form of curiosity.

III.

“In the background of every lofty literary work,” writes M. Bourget, “lurks the statement of some great psychological truth.”¹ . . .

At least it is necessary in the case of a novelist, who professes to be a psychologist as well, to discover on what principles his psychology is founded.

¹ “*Essais de Psychologie Contemporaine*,” p. 148.

The psychology of our classic writers was devoted to exhibiting the strife of two directly opposed qualities; as, for example, the conflict between reason and sensibility, between passion and the idea of duty. The character in whom this conflict was going on ignored no single phase of it, and was conscious every moment of all the elements working together to form his moral being. Thus the heroes and heroines of our classic tragedies, in the very height of their passion, are in full possession of themselves, and can examine and judge their own conduct.

With the personages of Balzac's books, some one faculty, grown to monstrous proportions, absorbs and masters all the others.

The naturalists in their novels, by a bold and frank process of simplification, reduce man to a simply passive *rôle* amidst conflicting instincts, and under the blind impulsion of matter.

But under these varied forms the same belief is to be found, a belief in the unity of the *me*. It is on the exactly opposite principle of the multiplicity of the *me* that M. Bourget's psychology is founded. The teachings of the author of "L'Intelligence," and the discoveries of the English psychologists, have brought even into the course of instruction given in our schools, the theory by which self (the *me*) is merely a collection of states of consciousness, a series of minute facts of the

psychical life. Accordingly, as M. Bourget assures us, this self, which was formerly presented to us as having been shaped once for all, is, on the contrary, being modified and renewed unceasingly, and is incessantly dying and being born again. From hour to hour our personality escapes us; and it is only by a gross illusion, albeit a beneficiary one, that we imagine ourselves, after an interval of years, to be still the same being as before. At every instant in the existence of this self, — this conscious *me*, — how many elements of widely diverse origin enter into the composition of our being.

First there is atavism, by which far-off lives leave an echo of themselves within us, and we inherit the shock following upon emotions we have never experienced. To take but a single example, the sceptic of to-day inherits, in spite of himself, something of the ancestral faith which, for centuries, fashioned the clay out of which his own heart is moulded.

Then there is education, which grafts an artificial being upon the natural being. Thus under the influence of our surroundings, in our daily contact with persons and things, a myriad impressions are unconsciously implanted within us. By whatever name, moreover, we may call the two principles, the corporeal and the spiritual, they exist in us and are not so much opposed as blended and

interpenetrated; therefore every sensation tends to transform itself into an idea, and every idea may be resolved into a sensation.

And it would be well for us if we could have any warning of all that is passing within us. But no analysis is subtle enough to unravel these complexities, and no human eye can penetrate into these deepest recesses of our nature. Beings slumber within us whose very existence we ignore, and which will probably always remain unknown to us. And yet it is possible that some unexpected shock may possibly reveal their existence, and this is a thought which may well fill us with terror. For it may be that at a turning of the road a being shall present himself before us whom we do not recognize, who bears little resemblance to what we have been hitherto, and is yet our very self, and shall remain so always. Therefore, in our utter ignorance of the energies hidden within us, none of us has the right to declare, I will never be *that man!* I will never do that deed! . . .

It is clear that such a doctrine as we have here set forth leaves no room for the will, in the sense, at least, of a faculty distinct from all the others, which overlooks and directs them. The strongest motive has the mastery, though we may go on attributing our defeats to ourselves. . . .

The Christian idea of responsibility likewise disappears, or is at least greatly modified. Yet doubt-

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less it would be unfair to assume that all morality is destroyed; for the same moral laws exist, whatever may be our theory in regard to them, but the foundations are altered which support the old edifice.

The play of human activities being thus conceived, what should be the attitude of the moralist before the spectacle of life? Determinism is not necessarily a pitiless doctrine. Hardness of heart may indeed find in it a pretext for its justification—for how can we feel sympathy toward mere machines?—And such is the conclusion drawn by our Realist writers. But it is just as legitimate to draw an exactly opposite one, and the tender and pitiful may find only another motive to arouse their sympathies.

For they may reason that if men are not the masters of their own actions, we have no right to reproach them for what they may do; and if they are not free to carve out their own lives, they suffer none the less from their ill-hewn destinies. We have not the right to search further. To know that there are beings who suffer, should be sufficient to make us resolve never to be the cause of suffering to others, but to assuage it wherever we meet it. Such is the doctrine of "pity," which is certainly better than that of indifference—that "religion of human suffering" which, called by its true name, is nothing more nor less than Chris-

tianity, but a timid and inefficacious Christianity after all.

IV.

A psychology founded on the principle of the multiplicity of the *me* is marvellously adapted to the analysis of love. For love is, in fact, not only the most complex of sentiments, but the only one into which we throw ourselves wholly, and in which all the tendencies of our nature are involved at once. Wherever love is found, there is a touch of the ideal; it is this which distinguishes it from mere brutal passion. On the other hand, there is no love so noble and disinterested that it includes nothing of this material element, so skilful in hiding itself under shapes the most unlike itself. For as regards platonism, so much talked about for ages, as ill-luck will have it, during all those ages it has never been met with.

That is why a simplified conception of love is so inadequate. The Romanticists choose to see only its sublimities; but this position is so entirely abandoned by the writer of fiction of our day, that it is not necessary to point out its falsity.

The system of the Realists, on the other hand, which consists in showing us only the vileness and shame of guilty passion, is no less incomplete. It merely renders the sin harder to understand instead of explaining it. An atom of love does exist at the bottom of the crucible — that crucible into

which the theorizer of *La Visite de Noces* pours all the vanity of man, all the *ennui* and curiosity of woman, and in which he refuses to see this atom of love at the bottom.

Here, in fact, lies the danger; for in affairs of the heart, the higher parts of our nature conspire with the lower to drag us to the most desperate downfalls.

When the psychologist is a moralist as well, when he is interested not only in the formation of the sentiments, but in their consequences, not only in the causes that produce certain acts, but in the worthiness or unworthiness of the acts themselves, he will turn without hesitation to the problems of love.

The complaint is often made that all modern literature turns upon the painting of this one passion. Are there not other sentiments in the human heart, and other events in life? Is not the place reserved for love infinitely small, in fact, compared with that filled by other affections, interests, and duties?

It is true, love fills but an hour in the life of most men, but that hour is decisive; for according to the fashion in which we understand this supreme emotion, we show ourselves as we are; it is the great test of character, and upon our experience of this emotion depends the welfare or ruin of our whole moral being.

Nothing is more charming, and nothing seems purer, than the first stages of a passion. It is the attraction of a mutual sympathy, from which we do not even think of defending ourselves. We wish to please, we seek to show what is best in us, we feel ourselves growing constantly better. The very young are completely the dupes of this illusion; but the most world-worn, in the emotion of a true love, find themselves susceptible of new freshness and delicacy of feeling. . . . Behold them again at the end of a few months or a few weeks. Where you had left a pure intimacy of soul, you will find a mere commonplace *liaison*.

“Cruelle Enigme” ends with these words: “He had loved this woman with the sublimest love; she held him now by what was basest and least noble in him. . . . The eternal Delilah had once more accomplished her work; and as the lips of the woman were quivering and caressing, he gave her back her kisses.”

The close of “Mensonges” is much the same: “René had but just discovered in himself this monstrosity of sentiment, the union of the most absolute contempt and the most passionate sensuous longing for a woman definitely judged and condemned. . . . To this had sunk his noble love, his worship for her whom he called his Madonna.” All poetry has disappeared, all sentiment and intellectual emotion; only the sensuous

instinct remains. It is thus that love degrades itself, while a corresponding degradation of the whole moral nature is going on at the same time.

How well they perceive this degradation, the two Marie-Alices, the mothers of Hubert Liauran. They soon divined under what influence their gentle, amiable Hubert had suddenly grown so hard. A woman, they sighed, has ruined his good heart! The whole effect is destroyed of the moral education upon which these two highly gifted women had lavished such wise solicitude, such ingenious tenderness. "Something had perished out of his moral life which could never be restored. It was one of those shipwrecks of the soul, which those who experience them know to be irremediable." — What acts of baseness a woman can make a man commit! — Reflects Armand de Querne at the moment when he has lied to the husband of his mistress. For treachery and falsehood are actions for which we can find all manner of excuses in particular cases, but they are none the less treachery and falsehood.

"Can it be that a man of sense can descend so low?" René Vinci asks himself, on seeing his friend plunged into an undignified *liaison* exactly similar to his own. But to what depths may not certain connections make a man of sense and heart descend? And if we look now into the

hearts of Bourget's women we see the same degradation. . . .

We are far enough now from the declamations of the romantic school upon the purifying and elevating power of love, and, indeed, to find the truth, we must, according to M. Bourget, exactly reverse this theory. A libertine is not saved by the love of a woman hitherto pure, but it is he who degrades her. ("Crime d'Amour.") A perverted woman is not saved by a man who loves her ingenuously; on the contrary, she perverts him, and he in turn perverts others. ("Cruelle Enigme," "Mensonges.")

In these encounters between two beings of unequal moral worth, it is a law that the one who is morally inferior shall end by dominating the other. This power of one soul over another is only a power of perdition. In this sense every love-story is the story of a "*liaison dangereuse*."

Such are these dramas of the inner life as interpreted by M. Bourget. In this sure demoralization of love by itself, and of the whole character by this one passion, everything suffers shipwreck. And it is this, in truth, independently of material consequences and outward events — of the scandals, duels, and violence which may or may not ensue — that makes of illegitimate passion an inevitable tragedy.

v.

Bourget's type of young man is a very pretty specimen of a race in its decadence. He is over-elegant and over-graceful, with pale complexion, slender figure, and narrow shoulders; everything about him giving evidence of impoverishment and degeneracy. His blood is not warm enough, the sap of life is not sufficiently abundant in him, he has no flow of animal spirits, and his bodily frame is entirely at the mercy of his nerves, there being nothing to counterbalance them. Education, instead of repairing the mistakes of nature, has aggravated them; for it is an effeminate education, a *chef-d'œuvre* of the unwise tenderness of modern parents, who take pains to remove every stone from the path of their children, with the result that when grown to manhood, they stumble at the slightest obstacle.

Likewise, the culture given by our classical course may have a dangerous effect on those youths who are not training themselves for a profession. For thought, once set in motion, does not stop short; it goes on working, even though it be in a vacuum, and thus becomes its own sole object. There is then nothing left for a man but to look within and see himself live, while analysis doubles all his perceptions and heightens sensibilities already too acute.

He becomes thus unfitted for action, and we may say unfitted for life. He is without self-mastery, easily swayed by desire and grief, wavering, uncertain, and a prey to constant agitation. . . . Such a young man, in his most agreeable incarnation, is a Herbert Liauran, or he may be a René Vinci, an André Cornélis. As for the "Disciple," Robert Greslou, his story is merely the study of a pathological case of a sort of monstrosity.

Sensibility is apt to exhaust itself by its own excess; or rather, as has been often noted, an aptitude for feeling too keenly is easily reconciled with the most absolute egotism. Besides, the abuse of analysis dries up the soul, and egotism is gratified by this perpetual return upon one's self.

It is possible, therefore, that the chief distinction between young men like Herbert de Liauran and Armand de Querne is one of age, and that it is only the special influences surrounding him that have made of the latter an utter sceptic at the age of thirty.

"College life and modern literature," he says, "had corrupted my thoughts before I had begun to live. This same literature had cut me off from religion before I was fifteen. The massacres of the Commune had revealed to me the lowest depths of human nature, and the intrigues of the follow-

ing years showed me equal depths of political corruption." ¹

Fast living does the rest; he becomes utterly disillusionized, this Lothario: "a child of the century without the elegy, and a nihilist without the rant." Yet all the while a fund of tenderness survives in him; it is this that distinguishes him from his master Valmont. He is not bad from malice pre-pense; he takes no pleasure in the suffering he causes. . . . The very fact that he is disillusionized shows a certain moral superiority; it is a sign that he had once formed a lofty conception of life, and had cherished an ideal.

On the lowest plane of all, we have the mere high-liver, who desires nothing beyond the pleasure of the moment, and for whom a few smoking-room aphorisms suffice as maxims of conduct; such is Casal, the Don Juan with the sixty pairs of shoes.

M. Bourget has drawn a portrait of one of these high-livers that gives a most vivid impression of life and reality. We can see with our bodily eyes this Baron Desfor-ges, the epicurean of fifty, whose mustache is still blond though his hair is turning gray, with his over-florid complexion and muscles in the highest vigor, thanks to the observance of a careful *régime*. Desfor-ges is at once an individual and a type — a really broad creation.

¹ "Crime d'Amour," p. 57.

He incarnates a generation, he represents the ideas of an entire class, a complete philosophy of existence. I had almost said a theory of government. He belongs to that aristocracy of the Second Empire, whose constant system it was to accept facts for what they are.

These men proved at least that they understood how to get the most out of life. For life is difficult only for those who cherish certain ideals; it is mournful only for those who dwell upon the difference between these ideals and reality. It is full of indulgence for those who ask only for the greatest possible sum of enjoyment.

On the whole, M. Bourget's figures of men are wanting neither in variety nor relief. His sketches of women, on the other hand, are all much alike, or differ only by faint shades. It could hardly fail to be so. It may be often observed in writers who show a special interest in, and understanding of, the feminine nature, that there is but one woman in their books, repeated a hundred times, until it becomes evident that while the point of view and the style of painting may change, the model is always the same. One aspect of the feminine nature appeals to them and attracts them, and the problem is forever presenting itself to them under the same form. Beneath all varieties in the individual image, there remains the one conception of "woman."

M. Bourget describes his Thérèse de Sauve as being "gifted by nature with all the qualities most disastrous to a woman in modern society. She had a romantic heart, while her temperament made her a creature of passion. She cherished at the same time her sentimental reveries and an invincible appetite for sensations."¹

This double nature is found in differing degrees and proportions in all M. Bourget's heroines. They are beings of sentiment, that is what makes them so attractive; but there is not one in whom this sensuous side is not to be found. . . . Suzanne Moraines and the actress Colette are the same woman under widely different social conditions.

They are of the same family as Madame Bovary, though M. Bourget has reduced the extreme type drawn by Flaubert to more ordinary human proportions.

The woman who belongs to this category is neither violent nor imperious nor deliberately cruel; she is not even a coquette, and would find no pleasure in torturing a man's heart. . . . These women have in their guiltiest aberrations one excuse, the only one to be made for love, and that consists in the love itself.

It is through this quality that M. Bourget's women retain a sort of nobility. The men he creates, on the other hand, all suffer from that malady

¹ "Cruelle Enigme."

he has so clearly analyzed elsewhere, — the incapacity for feeling. Can they love, those wretched youths, Alexandre, Hubert, and René? The most that can be said of them is that they let themselves be loved. With De Querne and his fellows the constant habit of introspection has destroyed all power of feeling.

Heroines of the heart or victims of the flesh, Bourget's women are truly worth more than their mediocre lovers.

"However faithless most women may be in love," writes the author of "*Mensonges*," "their baseness can never inflict punishment enough upon the secret selfishness of most men."

Thus every study of the relations between men and women, in affairs of the heart, ends in bringing into higher relief the fundamental egotism of man.

VI.

M. Bourget's books have never reached very large editions, but there are few books whose influence has been more real. It is, first of all, a literary influence. M. Bourget has recalled the writers of our day to the study of the inner life and to the analysis of cases of conscience; he has taught us anew that we have souls. He has brought into favor again a form of novel which is true to French traditions. The interminable novels of the seventeenth century were already, in

their most tolerable parts, novels of analysis ; and those *chefs-d'œuvre* the "Princesse de Clèves," "Manon Lescaut," "René," and "Adolphe," belong to the same order of books.

Bourget has also introduced a new type into literature, that of the man belonging to a declining civilization, who is over-intelligent, and suffers from an excess of brain culture ; and this type is constantly reappearing in the books of the day.

But there is another kind of influence which we must consider in speaking of M. Bourget. For the author of the "Essais" is himself convinced that our conduct depends in great measure upon what we read.

One entire book of his, "The Disciple," is devoted to the study of the moral responsibility of the thinker, and the question exists quite as much in the case of the novelist as of the philosopher. M. Bourget is of opinion that the writer, of whatever class, has charge of souls ; for his part he aspires to a thorough knowledge of the souls of his contemporaries only in order that he may guide them. There is no reproach, therefore, from which he has taken more pains to defend himself, than that which has so often been brought against him, of being an immoral writer.

This term of immorality, which seems so clear, is in truth one of the most obscure possible ; to use it is one of the surest means of complicating a

problem far from simple in itself. For a writer may be immoral while preaching virtue; and a certain horror of goodness is sometimes aroused in us by books of practical morality. On the other hand, we rarely find a writer actually preaching evil, and the counsellors of bad morals may be easily numbered. The moral bearing of a work depends less on the precepts formulated in it than the image of life it contains.

Now, it is bad policy to paint the reality under too beautiful and seductive colors; while, on the other hand, it may be urged that the spectacle of actual life is a too debasing one, and that it may prove the worst school of morality. . . .

However this may be, it is undeniable that there are books which leave us better armed for that struggle against the lower impulses of our nature in which moral life consists. Others, on the contrary, prepare us insensibly for defeat in the struggle. Of these at least, we can affirm positively that they are dangerous books. Any book is dangerous which, in the interpretation it gives of the play of human activities, diminishes the part played by our will. For in the moral order, and there alone perhaps, is verified the aphorism that will is power. But if the conviction once gains possession of us that all resistance is vain and all effort illusory, our energy itself is dried up at its source. For of what avail is it to strive? There

is nothing for us but to submit to our fate, and accept what we cannot avoid. We are conquered simply by not having contended.

Again, any book is dangerous which stirs up the evil dregs of our nature. . . . For in proportion as these bad elements rise to the surface, and we grow more clearly conscious of them, they become the more deadly. We may observe a similar phenomenon whenever we chance to read a medical treatise, — we seem to discover in ourselves all the symptoms of the maladies described. But in the case of maladies of the soul, to imagine them is to have them; and he who describes them should not disguise from himself that he may at the same time be propagating them. In this sense, I could name more than one *chef-d'œuvre* which must be called a dangerous work; and in considering art and literature from this point of view, we are driven to some strange conclusions.

I ask myself, then, how M. Bourget would undertake to prove that his are among the books that can be read without danger. For as to claiming that there are no dangerous books, that it is only the readers who make them dangerous, this is a mere quibble, since the question does not concern those pure souls to whom all things are pure.

Upon whom, then, is his influence exerted? First, on those young men whom we saw a few

years back affecting dilettantism and pessimism. But in the case of young men, literary fashions quickly pass. Dilettantism has ceased to be regarded as elegant, and M. Bourget himself now derides it. And as regards love, it is not usually books that corrupt men. It is accordingly over women that the novelist's influence is especially exercised; they form almost his exclusive audience.

Now, I think we can perceive clearly enough what emotions the reading of M. Bourget's novels is likely to awake in this class of readers.

I will select a typical "woman who reads Bourget," not from aristocratic circles, where women have little time or inclination for reading, nor from the rich Jewish set, where it seems this novelist has sometimes chosen his models, but out of that middle-class society whose women are well educated, and whose books often afford the only means of escape from the dull round of a life which is hard to live, trivial, and depressing.

We will picture such a reader, seated in a familiar corner of her salon, — that salon into which she has been able to introduce, thanks to the cheap shops, a certain semblance of luxury, — imitation tapestry, spurious marquetry, and counterfeit bibelots, all betraying the desire of their owner to emulate a higher social condition than her own. It is mid-day, an hour which she

reserves to herself after she is freed from household cares, and before entering on her daily round of visits. . . . This hour she often devotes to vague reveries and unacknowledged longings, to melancholy broodings over her lot, which seems to her so incomplete — over the early days of her married life and all that has followed since. She is married to an honest, industrious man whom she esteems, and whom she once thought she loved; but he has a dull mind and vulgar habits, as is so often the misfortune of these bourgeois marriages, where the wife is apt to possess more distinction of nature and more refinement of culture than the husband. Hence misunderstandings have grown up between them impossible to formulate, and to which no precise cause can be assigned. . . .

The book she now holds in her hands is "Crime d'Amour," or it may be "Mensonges;" and her hands tremble a little as she hastily turns the leaves, for she has been warned against reading it, but curiosity has got the better of her scruples. She has, however, no consciousness of wrong, for she knows herself to be attached to her duties, strictly disapproving of sin and ill-conduct; and she therefore assures herself that she is one of those who can read everything with impunity. . . . What she finds first of all in this book is that atmosphere of luxury and elegance for which she

has sighed so often. She experiences the sort of glamor which great wealth possesses for those who long for it; and she acknowledges that such surroundings may be suited to a different tone of manners and somewhat less rigid morals than those of the narrow, petty circle in which she moves.

The women whose adventures are here related have that sovereign charm to which everything is forgiven, combined with every physical grace, and with a winning sadness and gentleness of soul. She soon ceases to wonder at herself for pitying her fallen sisters; she is even drawn on by her womanly instincts to sympathize with them; and she ends by asking herself why she might not have been like them, for it is neither their intelligence nor their beauty that is lacking in her. Now at last she is troubled in the inmost recesses of her being . . . and there is nothing to break the spell or put her on her guard, for she finds nothing to shock her instincts of delicacy. It is words that cause alarm, and she has never heard certain subjects discussed in a style so devoid of coarseness.

Indeed, there is diffused over these stories of the flesh a sort of spirituality; a perfume of Christianity floats about them, and it is through this that they insinuate themselves the more easily into a Christian soul. Women are incapable of

reading disinterestedly ; they refer everything to themselves, and live over on their own account all the experiences imagined by the novelist. So this reader, on closing the book, has passed through a mental experience singularly fitted to prepare her for others more real.

It is by this disquieting analysis of passion, conducted with such anxious sincerity and such absolute candor, that M. Bourget has set his mark on contemporary sensibility. But we know very well that a writer can influence his period only in so far as he has imbibed its spirit, and reproduces its ways of thinking and feeling.

This analysis of love — destructive, as is all analysis, of the sentiment to which it is applied — was possible only in a period that has ceased to believe in the beneficent influence of love, and instead of seeing in it the ideal spur to our energies, merely yields to its influence as to a melancholy necessity — a dethronement of the soul.

This is the final term of the reaction against romanticism. The writers of that period, who saw everything with the eyes of youth, celebrated the sovereignty of passion ; and it would seem that in thus setting passion in the place of duty, by overthrowing all hitherto received tenets, they did wrong. Yet we may ask ourselves, if, on the whole, their imprudent enthusiasm was not better than the weary wisdom of our age.

It is a question still to be decided, whether we benefit poor humanity by exposing the falsity of those illusions by which it was once enchanted.

It matters little, however, from the point of view of psychological discovery, what the principle is from which we set out. The important thing is to have an instrument of discovery, and a standpoint whence to direct our gauge which will enable it to penetrate far and in a determinate direction.

Born into a period of moral decadence, of intellectual clear-sightedness, and of literary daring, M. Bourget has shown, with more clearness and precision than any one had done before him, what love becomes when despoiled of the poetic illusion, the mirage which gives it all its poetry. He bears his testimony in behalf of a weary generation, which, with a profound disgust for life, has also conceived a fear of love.





GUY DE MAUPASSANT.



GUY DE MAUPASSANT.

A LIFE wholly comprised in ten years of incessant literary production, in labor that was prolific without haste; starting with the instant conquest of celebrity and ending suddenly in hopeless madness; the life of a man who sought to enjoy everything with his mind and body at the same time; of an artist who, from the day when he created his first work of art until the final hour when the pen dropped from his fingers, never experienced the slightest diminution of talent, but advanced steadily with his eyes fixed on perfection; a brief and crowded life, which has a beauty of its own from the æsthetic standpoint, and a certain moral beauty also, since in the struggle with the difficulties of form and the more poignant struggle against the encroachments of his malady, it testifies to a continual effort of will — such is the life of Maupassant! And his work is *one*, amidst all its varieties, — one in its inward principle of action, however modified by the influences that pervade the air in an artistic period; always di-

rected toward the study of certain subjects, and yet reflecting all the manifold and changing aspects of reality; a work in which there is little that is mediocre and insignificant, and parts of which seem made of lasting material, capable of resisting the gnawing tooth of time—such is Maupassant's work! And it is because of this life and this work that the announcement of his death left none of us unmoved.

Even to-day, in spite of the effort to be on our guard against exaggerated sensibility, it is impossible, in speaking of him, to restrain all emotion. We are forced to express it in order to regain that freedom of mind indispensable to the work of the critic.

I.

Guy de Maupassant's life was entirely devoid of incident, in the ordinary sense of the term. As for those events that relate to the history of the mind and heart, those episodes of feeling which often exert a decisive influence over a writer's career, he has taken a jealous care to leave us in ignorance of them, and to keep his life securely hidden. He does not bring himself upon the scene in his books; he makes no display of his tastes and preferences; he never speaks in his own name, except in one of his latest works, the publication of which was almost torn from him. No one has escaped more completely from that mania



GUY DE MAUPASSANT.



for publicity, which in our days has developed in public and authors at once; the former craving to know all about the personality, where they should be content to admire the talent alone, the latter lending themselves complacently to this curiosity, which flatters alike an almost feminine instinct of coquetry, and a more deeply seated instinct for theatrical display.

Whenever Maupassant was solicited for a narrative of his life, he obstinately refused; he closed his doors against all indiscreet inquirers, and protested in advance against all possible indiscretions; he raised an effectual wall between himself and his fellow-men.

This was partly the result of a morbidly distrustful temperament, which never permitted him to confide in others. Reserved and cold in society, he yet conversed readily enough upon any topic which bore no reference to himself. His letters contain no confidences nor effusions; he was without friends. Thoroughly persuaded of the melancholy truth that it is impossible for us to enter into the soul of another, that each being forms an unapproachable and isolated whole, he lived in the midst of his fellow-creatures absolutely alone.

This reserve resulted also from the exalted and somewhat haughty conception he had formed of his profession as an author. For though he affected to see in it only a trade and a means of

liveliness, this was an affectation which deceived no one. It was simply his way of protesting against the stupid vanity and trivial elation of so many writers who cannot speak of literature without absurd pomposity, and who think because they devote their idle moments to the pen, they have become the pontiffs of a religion that raises them above humanity.

Chary as he is of details about himself, Maupassant enlightens us as sparingly in regard to his methods of work. He distrusts theories and dissertations on literature, although he has reflected seriously upon the object and conditions of art. He considers that nothing concerning the writer belongs to the public with the exception of his work, which should form a whole after the manner of organized beings — a living and impersonal whole. Therefore impersonality is the first characteristic that strikes us in Maupassant's work. The author strives to be absent from it, never letting his emotion break out, nor betraying his presence by the expression of an opinion, but content to let beings and events pass before our eyes after the fashion of nature — nature so indifferent to the life she gives.

Other writers, obstinately self-centred, can do nothing but retrace the history of their own souls under different forms; as for him, he tries to step outside of himself in order to live the life of others

who are as different from him as from each other. He assumes every variety of attitude and tone; therefore if the reader, in spite of this, succeeds in discovering behind these stories the nature of the story-teller himself, understands his temperament and feelings, and whether his humor be sad or gay, it is because a literary work, unless it is utterly commonplace and insignificant, cannot fail to reveal something of the character of him who conceived it.

It remains true, nevertheless, that the impersonal writer, instead of seeking an indirect means of bringing himself upon the scene, has for his sole object to create a world of individuals animated with a life of their own. His art is purely external and subjective. This said, we must hasten to add that no man owes more than Maupassant to his experience of life and to the material facts of that experience, such as the scenes he has witnessed, the people he has met, the anecdotes that have been related to him. Therefore, in order to discover the sources of his work, we must follow him step by step, enumerate the scenes he has passed through, the incidents he has beheld, the personages who have served him as models; and in making this enumeration, we shall simply be making a catalogue of his stories. This is curious, to say the least; and we must insist upon it, as it is thus we discover what is Maupassant's special turn of mind,

the original tendency in him which leads a man to become a writer, and a writer of a particular class.

Guy de Maupassant was born in Normandy, where he also passed his youth, returning there later for frequent sojourns. It is Normandy which has furnished the chief field of his observations; that province having supplied him with landscapes and characters, country-roads bordered by apple-trees, farm-interiors, market-places, taverns, and tribunals, local feasts and customs, the prolonged revelry at weddings, christenings, and funerals, and the whole population of sons of the soil, — country squires, farmers, and farmers' daughters, the crafty, litigious, and joke-loving peasantry.

Through his family — whose noble origin he only remembered later, at the period when his mind was beginning to fail — he was brought into social relations with the petty bourgeoisie. These small bourgeois reappear constantly in his books, ungracious figures, whose souls are narrowed by the mean cares of a sordid life.

Having finished his studies, he became for a time an employee in the ministry. Hence we see defile before us a procession of luckless officials, tattling and suspicious, stooping over their ungrateful tasks or bowing obsequiously before their chiefs, clinging forlornly to their solitary hope of promotion, their one day-dream of extra pay — the products

of a special form of human degeneracy bred by our bureaucratic system.

Being devoted to athletics and nautical sport, Maupassant has also given us sketches of amateur oarsmen, wild with youthful spirits and fresh air, disporting themselves amid the scenes of their habitual exploits between Bougival and Mendon; and from his intimate knowledge of all the regions of the world where love is to be bought, he has been able to afford us the most precise descriptions of those regions.

His profession having brought him into close relations with the staffs of the boulevard journals, he has hit them off to the life in the men and women journalists of "Bel Ami."

He is indebted to his recollections of the war for the narratives he has given us of the invasion; and to his journeys south, in pursuit of health, for his tales of travel, full of new types and fresh scenery. And finally in his later days, having yielded in spite of himself to the charms of fashionable society, he becomes in his turn the historian of human nature as it appears in salons.

Thus he is closely dependent on the scenes through which he has passed. It seems indeed as if his sole effort consisted in evolving from them all the "literature" they contain.

In the same way nearly all the individuals he brings upon the scene have really lived, and among

precisely such adventures as he attributes to them. Boule-de-Puif actually existed such as he shows her to us, and worthy of her nickname; she was the heroine of the particular kind of exploit by which her memory has deserved not to perish. Mouche really existed, and so did the Rosier de Mme. Husson. The adventure of Morin's pig actually took place between Gisors and Les Andelys.

The theme of the other stories was supplied to Maupassant by friends; we have even been told when and by whom.¹ But this is not all. When we come upon those tales of horror in every collection of his stories, — narratives of nights passed in the clutch of a nameless anguish, of hallucinations, visions of strange beings from another world, all the phenomena of double vision, as when a man about to sit down in his chair or at his table sees *himself* already seated there; painful sensations of the invisible become suddenly palpable and hostile; and all these pages in which we feel the thrill and shudder of madness, — we had believed that the author was merely working this vein of horrors as others had done before him, and trying his hand at this particular form of the fantastic. He was even reproached with his tendency in this direction; but alas! we now know that here also he was only transcribing realities,

¹ M. Émile Faguet, *Revue Bleue*, 15 July, 1893.

and setting down visions that had actually appeared to him.

Such is Maupassant's habitual method; he neither invents nor imagines. As may readily be believed, in making this statement I do not seek to detract from his creative power. But there exist two distinct classes of writers. On the one hand, there are those who start from an *idea*, which may vary infinitely in kind, from the dream of the poet to the abstract conception of the novelist; this idea generates their work, evoking and grouping around itself all the elements borrowed from reality, modifying and vivifying them, and creating its own modes of expression. These writers dominate the impression they receive from reality.

The other class are dependent on the outward impression; they start from a fact; the work they accomplish is wrought upon data coming from without. Maupassant is one of these.

He defines somewhere the writer's special gift: "His eye is like a suction-pump, absorbing everything; like a pickpocket's hand, always at work. Nothing escapes him. He is constantly collecting material; gathering up glances, gestures, intentions, everything that goes on in his presence — the slightest look, the least act, the merest trifle."¹

This, however, is only the receptive power which

¹ Maupassant, "Sur l'Eau," p. 40.

stores up images ; it may suffice for the painter, but is not enough for the writer. For him a gesture is of value only as it betrays an impulse of the soul, an attitude only of worth as it is significant of an emotion, and every physical act counts merely for what it reveals of character.

To the data given by sensation must be added the work of intelligence. With Maupassant this work is at once rapid and intense. He finds himself in presence of an individual whom he does not know, or whom he has lost sight of for a long time. "In a single flash, more rapid than my motion in offering him my hand, I knew his previous existence, the sort of man he was, his order of mind, his theories of life."¹

In the same way if he meets a man from the provinces, a complete picture of provincial life appears before him ; or if he sees an aged vagabond stretched out on the benches of a brewery, he divines his whole character and previous life, his original weakness of will, and the crises which have brought this weakling to utter wreck. Again, the meagre outline and angular profile of a housewife reveal to him better than any confidences the long tedium of her narrow existence.

It is the same with facts as with human beings. For most of us, many episodes in the life going on about us seem unimportant or pass unperceived

¹ "Le Rosier de Mme. Husson," p. 6.

without fixing our attention, simply because their meaning escapes us, as the words of an unknown language strike on our ear in vain; but it is clear that a fact takes on new significance as soon as we perceive the motives that led to it, and can trace it to its cause. This is what happens with the observer who takes in at a glance the long process epitomized in each moment of a human life.

Maupassant possesses in an eminent degree "those two very simple faculties, — a clear vision of forms, and a ready intuition of what lies beneath them."¹ This gift for perceiving in a rapid glance at the outside of things their inner contents is, in the case of Maupassant, the primal and essential gift which makes the work of a writer possible to him, and decides its direction. Induced to write, not by the stimulus of an idea, but by the impulse he received from the beings and events about him, he adheres closely to reality, and he sees this reality in distinct tableaux and scenes, each forming a complete and isolated whole.

His literary education accentuated still further this natural tendency in Maupassant. It is thus that he sums up the instruction he received from Flaubert: "The great thing," said Flaubert, "is to look at everything we wish to describe long enough, and with sufficient attention, to discover

¹ "Notre Cœur," p. 18.

an aspect of it which has never been seen or described by any one else. There is an unexplored side to everything. . . . To depict the blaze of a fire, or a tree in a field, we must plant ourselves before that fire or that tree until they are like no other tree or fire to us. . . . Having also asserted the truth that there are no two grains of sand in the world absolutely alike, he made me describe some person or object in a way that particularized it clearly in a few brief sentences.”¹

Everything therefore contributed to fix Maupassant's gaze upon a particular bit of reality directly observed, then studied in itself and sounded to its depths.

What was the influence on the whole of the author of “*Mme. Bovary*” upon his so-called “disciple”? Was it profitable, or the reverse? It was certainly profound; and among the many things that Maupassant owes to Flaubert, we must reckon some of his incontestable faults.

For instance, the master's hypochondria, added to that of the pupil, gave a deeper tinge to the latter's contemptuous outlook upon humanity. As if a man had the right to despise mankind, and as if a writer's first duty were not one of sympathy.

The pupil also accepted with confidence some of the master's blindest prejudices; this is how he has managed to put so many *Bouvards* into his

¹ “*Pierre et Jean*,” Preface.

books, and a trifle too many Pécuchets. Happily on some points he has defended himself from this influence, thanks to the vigor of his own originality. He never believed with Flaubert that literature constitutes the whole of life; that life in fact was merely bestowed upon us to supply a subject for literature. Neither has he adopted the puerilities to which Flaubert was driven by his superstitious reverence for style, and his belief that a hiatus was an affair of state.

On other points he was gradually able to throw off this influence. For example, having at first conceived of realism on the model of "L'Éducation Sentimentale," he formed, later on, a conception more in accord with his own artistic instincts. In the same way, having entered the literary ranks under M. Zola's auspices, and at a time when naturalism was in the ascendant, he owed to the associations of his *début* all the faults and affectations of his first manner, such as choosing to describe only a small section of humanity, and a few exceptional types chosen from the lowest classes; also an exaggeration carried to the limits of caricature in some of his portraits, and an excessive coarseness of expression which emphasized the coarseness of his subjects. Naturalism had worked the miracle of confusing the vision of this clear-sighted observer, and it required time for him to regain the proper standpoint.

Apparently the greatest benefit that Maupassant derived from his apprenticeship to his friends Bouilhet and Flaubert was the discipline of that apprenticeship itself.

Bouilhet was constantly reminding him that a hundred lines of faultless verse suffice for an author's fame; he taught him that continuous labor and profound knowledge of one's trade may bring about, on some lucky day, the sudden blossoming forth of the short, unique, and perfect work of art. Bouilhet gave this advice with the sharper conviction from his consciousness, as an honest literary man, that he himself had missed this longed-for perfection.

For some years Flaubert made Maupassant tear up his poems, stories, and dramas, in short all his first essays in literature, many of which would undoubtedly have been well received by the public. He thus spared him those first fatal successes, whose greatest danger is that they lure a writer from his true path and encourage him in his worst defects. Lessons on the difficulties of art, and laborious preparation for it, are all too rare in these days.

When Maupassant began to publish, he was in full possession of his talent, and his individuality had ripened at leisure. That individuality was sufficiently pronounced to react against mere fashion, and even to follow it without danger.

The inspiration of his stories remains essentially the same from first to last. In the matter of literary form and style, he has varied only so far as was consistent with remaining always himself.

II.

Maupassant began by writing verses; that seems to be the rule, the versified form being the inevitable one for the dawn of literature, and for the budding writer as well. Nearly all the masters of contemporary prose have begun by writing verses, even M. Alexandre Dumas himself. Later they proved their critical taste by not repeating the experiment.

The best of these early poems of Maupassant's are the two entitled "Au Bord de l'Eau" and "Vénus Rustique." These rise above the commonplace, but not far enough to make us regret that Maupassant wrote no more poetry. In fact, we find nothing in them which is not to be met with in his succeeding volumes; they are sensuous tales related in a brisk style not far removed from prose. Maupassant was not born a poet. By this we do not mean that he was incapable of poetic feeling; poetry does not consist exclusively of the lyrical, especially that form of the lyrical embodied in sentimental effusions and dreams.

Maupassant writes somewhere: "I feel vibrating through me something akin to every form of

animal life ; I thrill with all the instincts and confused desires of the lower creatures. Like them I love the earth, not men, as you do. I love it without admiring it, without poetizing or exalting it ; I love, with a profound and bestial love, at once contemptible and sacred, all that lives, all that thinks, all that we see about us, — days, nights, rivers, seas, and forests, the dawn, the rosy flesh and beaming eye of woman ; for all these things, while they leave my mind calm, trouble my eyes and my heart.”¹

He is the dupe of his own words when he speaks of a love of nature which does not poetize her ; for this sentiment of communion with all created beings is essentially a poetic sentiment, and has inspired a large share of the poetry of the ancients.

But it is not by sentiment that a poet distinguishes himself from one who is not a poet ; it is by the gift of expression. A man is not a poet by the head and the heart, but by the ear and the eye. The poetic gift demands sensitiveness to the peculiar harmony of words, and sonority of syllables, to effects of rhythm and cadence ; it requires also a tendency to clothe one's thought in images. Maupassant's phrases, though they have a full harmony and a firm design, are not musical ; his style is marked by precision rather than by imagery.

¹ “ Sur l'Eau,” p. 87.

“Boule de Suif,” “La Maison Tellier,” “Mademoiselle Fifi,” “Les Contes de la Bécasse,” “Clair de Lune,” “Les Sœurs Rondoli,” to which must be added “Une Vie,” “Bel Ami,” and “Mont-Oriol,” are books which settle once for all what is the literary physiognomy of Maupassant. They are the books of a story-teller in exuberant health and spirits, overflowing with life and boisterous gaiety, and betraying a brutal touch and a cynical sneer.

“Boule de Suif” is a challenge calmly flung at all social conventions and proprieties, at bourgeois prudery and fashionable hypocrisy; a sort of comic wager to rehabilitate the courtesan, who is made to incarnate the idea of country, and personify the thought of resistance to the enemy.

“La Maison Tellier” is an experiment of the same kind, in which the writer takes visible pleasure in scandalizing the cockneys. The author is careful to warn us, in short preambles to most of these tales, that they were written after dining and wining, with a brain heated by the fumes of the wine and the cigar smoke. It is at such times that the bagman, who lurks beneath the polished surface even of men of intellect, asserts his claims; he needs coarse, broad jokes, and Maupassant furnishes them only too liberally. Fully half of his stories belong to the species known as *gaulois* (old French), a style always in demand in a country where the national imagination has expressed

itself freely in Fabliaux, and reckons among the treasures of its literature the Contes of La Fontaine and Voltaire.

This Gallic humor has assumed at certain epochs a vein of learning and refinement, and has then become undoubtedly the most odious and repugnant form of literature. Maupassant has at least been saved from this last extreme by the vigorous sap of his imagination. He is a *gaulois* in the broadest sense of the word.

It is also after the fashion of our ancestors that he takes delight in narrating ridiculous adventures and low farces, only calculated to produce broad merriment and boisterous, unthinking laughter. In these stories there defiles before us a series of trivially ugly mortals, grotesque in their deformity, or extravagantly comic. . . . Here and there a tragic incident breaks forth; for we are never allowed to forget that man is a vicious animal, ferocious as well as lewd, and with the instinct of destruction.

Some of these "sketches" bring into relief the profound egotism of man, others his unconscious immorality or the perversion of his moral ideas. And there is never the slightest relief, not a note of tenderness or pity; always the violence and harsh irony of an observer, stripped of all illusions.

These same traits doubtless characterize Mau-

passant to the end ; but we shall see that, later on, they are softened and modified by others which take away somewhat from the roughness of the ensemble.

The literature of the last ten years has been marked by influences which have tended to humanize, and at the same time to broaden, men's minds. It has been borne in upon our writers that if, as science seems to show, fatality is a law of human activity, — not that outward fatality which the ancients conceived of as calling forth heroic struggles, but an inward fatality arising from the instincts of our nature and our inherited characteristics, and pregnant with dark catastrophes, — we must therefore pity poor humanity for the miseries which it is powerless to escape. It is manifestly unjust to despise men, and useless to hate them.

Maupassant was no stranger to this movement, and as time went on he became more and more an adherent of it. He was no longer satisfied to stand outside his characters, and point out their absurdities and follies ; to turn the light on obscure recesses of their nature, where dark and shameful motives lurk, nor to humiliate them by exhibiting the powerlessness of their efforts and the fruitless absurdity of their best intentions. He sought rather to penetrate into their souls, and to tread their painful path beside them.

“Yvette” is the story of the daughter of a courtesan, constrained by the fatality of her birth and surroundings to become, in her turn, such an one as her mother. Her longings to be a virtuous woman, the revolt of her instincts of modesty, her desperate attempts to escape from her life, all are alike futile; her sentence has been pronounced beforehand, and there is no appeal. It is the “Demi-Monde” (Dumas’ play) with a truer *dénoûement*; and the story is so admirably told, without rant or vain commiseration, that we are overcome in the end by the thought of this stain inflicted by life on a human soul.

“M. Parent” is one of those good-natured, credulous bourgeois, whom their folly predestines to the fate of George Dandin; but this time the author does not make merry at the expense of a worthy man. He makes him interesting to us by the very fact of his confiding nature, and the rascality of those who betray him; and we respect in him that impulse of the heart which stirs him to paternal tenderness for the child of another. His mischance ceases to be a vulgar incident, and rises to the dignity of a misfortune, — a misfortune which ingulfs his life, and leaves him a mere drifting waif and nameless wreck of humanity.

“Mlle. Perle,” in which we seem to hear the stifled throbbings of a timid heart that sacrifices itself, is almost a sentimental romance.

In "Petite Roque," Maupassant strikes one of the most agonizing of problems, — how a worthy man can become, in an hour of aberration, the peer of the worst of criminals; a prey henceforth to remorse, trembling each night at the return of darkness, when, as visible things vanish, the image of his crime starts out luridly before him. Maupassant has reached that stage where he no longer ignores the battles that are waged in the heart of man, torn by a host of conflicting emotions, or the painful struggles that are carried on against some besetting idea. It is such a struggle that gives its tragic tone to the novel of "Pierre et Jean."

In "Fort comme la Mort," which recounts the agony of heart of an old man in love with a young girl, pity triumphs wholly. When the painter, Olivier Bertin, conquered by the violence of a passion as hopeless as it is irrational, feels the need of giving vent to his misery, it is to his deserted sweetheart he turns for solace, — to her whom he no longer loves, and who suffers so keenly at being loved no more.

So, in all these later books, it was some crisis of the human heart which interested Maupassant, strangely cured of his former impassibility. He had turned to the psychological novel, which was becoming once more the fashion, and had adopted the form which he saw in favor about him.

In "Notre Cœur," the descriptions of fashionable society are as prominent as in M. Bourget's most popular novels of the same type.

Maupassant had a constant desire to renew his work, which has not been sufficiently noticed. His latest attempts were in the direction of the stage.

If I do not dwell upon "Musotte" and "La Paix du Ménage," it is because there is a great deal of M. Jacques Normand in the first, and a great deal of M. Alexandre Dumas in the second, and because in both plays, what has been added to the original stories from which they were drawn, is by no means their best part.

III.

Now, we are conscious, on closing these books, — some of which are intended to be exclusively amusing and comic, — of a painful tightening of the heart, and an impression of mental torture and distress. And it does not sufficiently explain this feeling to recall the growing sadness of Maupassant's inspiration, nor certain terrifying confessions, like that of the "Horla." It is from every side of the novelist's work that this impression arises. Its very foundations are arid and desolate.

In a period of universal pessimism, no writer has done more to show the hollowness of all things, and give us the sensation of absolute nothingness. He may be said to have proceeded, by a system of

elimination, to strip man of everything that could serve as an object of hope, as an aim to his energies, as a charm or prop to his soul. It is not that he is endowed with especial penetration of mind, or that it is given to him to sound the most arduous problems to their depths. It is rather for the opposite reason. Maupassant is in no wise a thinker; we perceive this, whenever he ventures to express his ideas upon any abstract question whatsoever; as in "L'Inutile Beauté," where a man of the world confides to us his conception of the Deity.

Doubtless Maupassant, with his marvellous gift for endowing his characters with appropriate speech, cannot be held personally responsible for the imbecilities of this gentleman; but when we recall certain utterances of his own, and the habitual themes in which his thought revels, we can fancy that such a conception of the Creator may not have seemed to him wholly irrational; and when this same Rudolphe de Salins proceeds to set forth his theories of human destiny, to wit, that thought is a regrettable accident of our creation, and that the earth was really created for the lower animals, not for man, we recognize Maupassant speaking through his lips.

Everything belonging to the intellectual order, all great works, all conquests of the mind, fail to appeal to him; and, as so often happens, he denies

the existence of everything he does not comprehend. "We know nothing, we see nothing," he declares; "we imagine nothing, we divine nothing, we are capable of nothing; we are shut up, imprisoned in ourselves, and yet there are people who are dazzled by human genius! . . . The thought of man is stationary; its narrow, exact, insurmountable limits once attained, it turns like a circus horse in the ring, or like a fly in a sealed bottle, dashing itself against the glass walls that imprison it."

Of what use, then, is philosophy with those explanations, sometimes preposterous and always inadequate, by which men seek to solve problems that must always remain insoluble, perhaps because they have no meaning?

Of what use is science, which, however far it may seem to carry its investigations, always brings up at the unknowable, and serves only to make us conscious that we ignore everything which it would be important to us to know?

Of what good are the arts, which consist only in vain imitation and a tame reproduction of things depressing in themselves? "The poets only make out of words what the painters attempt with colors, and to what purpose? When we have read the productions of three or four of the most ingenious, it is quite useless to turn the pages of the others — we shall be none the wiser." All the efforts of men

are useless ; they organize themselves into society in order to work together to promote that civilization which leads to progress and humanity ; and out of this social organization has grown war, which is not only a return to original savagery, but is, in fact, an aggravation of it ; for "the real savages are not those who fight that they may eat their enemies, but those who fight merely to kill."

Society is ruled by laws ; and those laws merely perpetuate, by their sanction, odious customs and criminal prejudices. Above the laws stands morality, and it is in the name of morality that some of the worst iniquities are committed. Above morality again rises religion ; and religion, when it is not an hypocrisy, is a delusion and a snare. . . .

To what end, then, is all this labor, over which human thought — that eternal worker — has exhausted itself for ages ? Alas, if it were merely sterile ! But it is thought that makes human existence so painful, and inflicts upon us alone, among living creatures, the privilege of suffering. For the beasts, that do not think, do not suffer.¹

As regards the men whom Maupassant meets in daily life, or those whom he brings upon the scene in his books, the more their mental activity is developed, the less respect he has for them. He barely admits an exception in the case of artists

¹ " Sur l'Eau," *passim*.

and writers, doubtless through fellow-feeling and a sense of comradeship.

Among all the personages who people his "human comedy," there is not one being of superior culture. The highly polished, the men of the world who shine in society, are especially contemptible in his eyes. They merely slide over the surface of things without understanding or appreciation. Their aspirations, their taste, their sympathies, their pleasures even, are factitious, conventional, and false. The bourgeoisie, a mob of college men and functionaries, are more homely and equally ridiculous. Maupassant is half inclined to give the preference, over them all, to those crafty peasants who bring such amusing and ingenious duplicity to the service of their love of gain. But his real sympathies go out to those simple rustics, with sound and vigorous bodies, who have no ambition beyond developing their muscles, and who have found out, by following their instincts, the true end of life.¹

The one sentiment which Maupassant paints over and over again, and in which he sees the only charm of existence, — the sentiment of love, — he has despoiled of every remnant of the ideal. He empties it of all thought; and such as he shows it to us, it can scarcely be called a sentiment.

Humanity may go on deluding itself with

¹ "La Vie Errante," p. 20.

dreams of a union of souls in love, self-forgetfulness, and abnegation, of mystic unions far above the realm of matter and the senses, which will survive amid the ruin and destruction of all else. These are mere idle dreams — a tissue of falsehoods as alluring as they are frail!

“We pursue an ideal which we never attain, seeking it under that glamor of beauty which seems to hide a thought beneath that infinite look in the eyes which is only a tint of the iris, in that charm of the smile which comes from a mere glitter of pearl and curve of lip, in that indescribable grace of movement, born of chance and a harmony of lines.” If this ideal beauty forever escapes us, leaving us wearied out by the vain pursuit, it is because it is a mere chimera.

The Gioconda, after all these ages, has never yielded up the secret of her smile; and her worshippers have been driven to despair in striving to decipher an enigma which has no solution. But there exists, in the museum of Syracuse, a statue of Venus really worthy of worship. “This is not the poetized, idealized woman, a divine, majestic being like the Venus of Milo; it is woman such as she is, as we love and desire her and seek to embrace her, — large, with massive breasts and strong and heavy limbs.”¹ This is the carnal Venus, the rustic divinity — a peasant formed like a

¹ “La Vie Errante,” p. 118.

goddess. She is divine, not because she expresses a thought, but simply because she is beautiful.

Such is Beauty: merely a snare spread by nature. She awakens, in the depths of our being, unexplained ardors, above all at that season when the renewal of nature sends the same sap and the same desire for love to the heart of all the living. . . .

Love thus understood, deprived of all that Maupassant calls elsewhere "the music of love," and reduced to the mere pleasure of the senses, is surely the most deceptive of all the emotions we can conceive. For it is of the essence of such passion to destroy itself by its own excess. And moreover, this very beauty, realized for a time in perfect harmony of line, and the soft contours of the perishable flesh, withers, alters, and finally vanishes forever; and youth goes too, that youth which gives us the desire to love, and at the same time makes us lovable! Nothing is left but regret—the regret for all these vanished things. The dream is over; and from all the pathways of life, those we have already trodden, and those along which we are still to drag our weary feet, one image alone arises, — that of Death.

This image of Death is everywhere present in Maupassant's works; it casts its shadows over all; it rises at the moment when we expect it least — a startling and terrible vision.

We recall, in "Bel Ami," the strange effect produced by Norbert de Varenne's discourse on death, coming as it does after a series of wanton images, and in the midst of rakish adventures. He suddenly breaks forth: "There comes a day, you know, when no matter what you are looking at, you see Death lurking behind it. . . . As for me, for the last fifteen years I have felt the torment of it, as if I were carrying a gnawing beast. I have felt it dragging me down, little by little, month by month, hour by hour, like a house that is crumbling away. . . . Each step I take brings me nearer to it, every moment that passes, every breath I draw, hurries on its odious work. . . . Breathing, sleeping, eating, drinking, working, dreaming, — everything we do is simply dying by inches. . . . Now I see it so near that I often stretch out my arm to thrust it back!"¹

And so he goes on, absorbed in this one thought, so repugnant to a living being that he finds it hard to grasp it fully, — the thought of utter annihilation. The world, he reflects, will go on existing, millions upon millions of people will yet be born, and the sun will continue to rise for them, there will still be dawns and evenings. But of all these things he will see nothing; he will have ceased *to be*.

Thus, too, little Yvette, at the moment when

¹ "Bel Ami," p. 160.

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she takes her own life, bewails her beauty, weeps for her face, her eyes, her cheeks, which must moulder away in the dark earth. So Anne de Guilleroy, as she stands beside her mother's grave, looks back over her past life, and reflects that the day will come, and is not perhaps far distant, when she shall go in her turn. This it is that poisons all the joys of men. "If we thought about it, if we were not distracted, diverted, and blinded by all that goes on around us, we could not live — the thought of this endless massacre would drive us mad."¹

And if this approaching death were merely probable! but it is inevitable — as inevitable as night following on day. Is it not strange that we can laugh, amuse ourselves, be joyful, under the shadow of this eternal certainty of death!"²

So the lament of the materialist is joined to the meditation of the Christian; for religion and philosophy lead us by different roads to the consciousness of the same irremediable woe. We see in all this the sort of bitter sterile sadness which lurks in the depths of Maupassant's works.

For there is a generous sadness which elevates the soul and heightens the courage; a sadness that may be efficacious and salutary. It has been said, not without reason, that pessimism is the surest

¹ "Fort comme la Mort," p. 157.

² "Regret," p. 284.

agent of progress; since it leads us, through discontent with the actual order of things, to wish for something different, and thus prepares the coming of a better time. But this is when we reflect on the greatness of human destiny, and measure the distance that separates us from the goal we see before us. The sadness of a Maupassant, on the contrary, leaves us bowed beneath a harsh and humiliating bondage, without hopes or dreams.

In his view, the many inventions of man have for their object, not only to tread down and suppress the animal instinct within us, but also to mask for us the horror of the last hour.

Religion speaks to us of a future life by which this terrestrial life may be prolonged through eternity. Morality lays down precepts, that testify, through all changes, to the duration of conscience. Arts, science, letters, all attest the perpetuity of human thought in the midst of ruins.

But under the action of this sombre materialism all these spells and illusions vanish. Mortal man remains face to face with that mystery, upon which he can no more gaze steadily than on the sun. He sees Death constantly at work, even upon Love itself — that mocking Love which unites two beings for life, at a moment which, like all our moments, is sweeping them on to final destruction.

IV.

This philosophy — for it is one — a short-sighted philosophy, whose grossly materialistic and despairing conclusions Maupassant adopts with a sort of fierce conviction, gives, after all, its significance and human value to his work.

What constitutes its value from the literary standpoint is that Maupassant was an artist; more so than any other writer of his generation. We have plenty of savants, offering us everything, from natural history to sociology, under the guise of literature; we have novelists enough, presenting us with crude reality in its most desultory, incoherent, and inchoate form; we have dramatists in plenty to offer us raw slices of life; poets willing to suggest a world of emotions by the mere play of vowels; painters, sculptors, and musicians in words — but what we sadly lack is *writers*, conscious that writing is an art, having its own methods of expression, its rules and laws, whose application is in itself something admirable; and that even before being an art, writing is a trade in which one must go through an apprenticeship, and, before passing muster, must achieve a masterpiece.

Here, again, Maupassant has bequeathed us no long confidences; but a few lines like these suffice: "Those whom nothing satisfies," he says,

“who are easily discouraged because they dream of something better, who feel that the bloom has been taken off everything, and to whom their own work gives the impression of common, worthless labor, come to judge of literary art as a thing unattainable, mysterious, which is barely revealed to us by a page here and there of the great masters. The rest of us, who are merely painstaking, tenacious workmen, can struggle against invincible discouragement only by continuous effort.”¹ And what is more eloquent, more conclusive, than all protestations, is the continuous effort visible throughout his work.

The first sign by which an artist may be recognized is his possessing a definite idea of his art, knowing its objects and its methods, what he himself wishes to do, and by what means he hopes to succeed.

Poets, novelists, all who style themselves original writers, are not wont to admit this. They have a sort of coquetry about letting us believe that they do not know what they do; a fine work seems to them finer for not having been done purposely. It is their ambition to pass for unconscious creators, like the blind forces of nature. But facts offer a striking contradiction to this theory, for it is rare to find a great writer who is not at the same time a shrewd critic.

¹ “*Pierre et Jean*,” Preface.

As regards Maupassant, it has been asserted that he brought forth his tales as naturally as the apple-trees of his native Normandy bear apples. But this is not true; in fact, it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that he had theories of his own, although he was one of those who protest against theories in literature. But in any case, he had reflected upon the theories prevailing in his day; and his originality consists in the corrections and reserves he brought to the system of the Realists or Naturalists, which were due to his more judicious knowledge of the requirements of art.

It is the pretension of these writers to "do true work" (*faire vrai*); and there can be no more legitimate aim, were it not that this desire for the true has served, many times, as a pretext for bizarre experiments, as remote from truth as from beauty.

They claim also, not only to express the truth, but to express it completely; in other words, to give an exact reproduction of life. But life is made up of minute facts, many of which are unimportant, illogical, and contradictory.

The artist should therefore select from this confused jumble of chances and futilities only such characteristic details as suit his subject; and it is precisely by this work of selection that he produces a work of art.

Life, again, presents everything on the same plane, and either precipitates events or allows

them to drag on indefinitely. "Art, on the other hand, consists in carefully prepared effects and skilfully disguised transitions, in the dexterity which throws a high light on the essential events, giving to the rest the degree of relief suited to them." Art continually corrects events for the sake of resemblance, even at the expense of reality. By this means, "instead of showing us a commonplace photograph of life, it presents us with a vision more complete, more startling, more convincing, than reality itself." But who talks of reality, and what reality is meant, since it appears differently to each individual? "Each one of us creates his own illusion of a world in accordance with his nature. The writer's only mission is to reproduce this illusion faithfully, by all the processes of art he has acquired and can make use of."¹

All this results in clearly separating art and life, the former being a reproduction of the latter, all the more precious for not undertaking to be a servile copy; and this is none the less realism because it is realism interpreted by the artist. The final aim of art is to disguise itself. Nearly all the writers of to-day, however, obstinately insist on displaying their preparatory labor before our eyes in the most displeasing fashion. The naturalists empty into their books the whole mass of

¹ "Pierre et Jean," Preface.

notes collected in their portfolios. The psychologists make us travel over all the roads they have followed to arrive at some discovery, which is the only thing that interests us. But the artist understands that if he undertakes this long and tedious labor it is simply in order to spare it to the reader. A finished portrait should not let either the canvas or the rough sketch show through. This is the method of Maupassant, who shows us nothing but results.

v.

If we wish now to find the best specimens of this art, of which we have endeavored to point out the principles, it is not in Maupassant's novels that we must seek them. Not that these novels are without merit; but Maupassant is less original there, being more dependent on surrounding models. His novels do not form his most individual contributions to the contemporary movement in literature; and if he had never written them, though there would be wanting to his work some admirable pages, and even one fine book, "Pierre and Jean," we should still possess all the essentials of his talent. Moreover, the writer is not at his ease in the wider setting of the novel, being used to seeing the reality cut up into small pictures, each perfect in itself. He therefore composes a novel by enlarging a short story or piecing

together a series of short stories ; and soon tired of a subject, as is the way with nervous temperaments, he does not care to live long with his personages, or give himself much of their society ; he prefers, after planting a character firmly on its legs, to go on to another, and a multiplicity of little jobs suits him better than lingering over a long one. Moreover, as he admits no especial type of novel as the standard, and since all forms are good in his eyes, provided the writer carries out his design, it is by his intentions, above all, that we should judge him.

He gives to his novel "Une Vie" the sub-title "The Humble Truth." He seems, therefore, in this instance, merely to have sought to sketch the image of a life similar to hosts of others. But by accumulating on the head of a single mortal all the miseries of life, he has really drawn a privileged being ; the case may be none the less possible or true, but it ceases to be an humble truth, and becomes an exceptional one.

In "Bel-Ami" he has sought to bring before our eyes varied scenes from the existence of a sort of literary adventurer ; but of all his books this is the one which leaves the strongest impression of monotony — the only one, perhaps, which can really be called tiresome.

In "Mont-Oriol" the frame is too large for an incident which would gain by being passed over

lightly, and has, in fact, often been so treated by Maupassant himself. Finally, leaving what he calls the subjective novel for the form which is its exact opposite, the psychological novel, Maupassant proved by the success of "Pierre et Jean" that his talent was not only vigorous but supple, and could lend itself to the most widely differing experiments.

If, however, he has not repeated this success either in "Fort comme la Mort," or even in "Notre Cœur," it is perhaps because, though he was capable of making an excursion into the domain of psychological study, that domain was not his own; the characters he understands best being the least complex, and the sentiments which he has especially studied not lending themselves to any very subtle analysis.

It is in the short story that Maupassant is at his best, and able to defy all rivalry. Here he is a creator, — the indispensable condition for being a master. He has renewed this style of composition and made it the fashion. To this vogue we no doubt owe that flood of commonplace and insipid tales with which we are daily inundated: the short story having become a current article of consumption, and finding its place in the newspapers between the column of gossip and the latest news. Here we find that law of compensation by which we are all forced to pay dearly for

our pleasures; we also see the working of that other law, by which the production of one masterpiece leads fatally to a succession of more and more feeble reproductions.

“L’Histoire d’une Fille de Ferme,” “En Famille,” “L’Héritage,” “Mon Oncle Jules,” “Les Bijoux,” “l’Enfant,” and a score of others which we could cite, give that impression, which art seeks to produce — of absolute fulness and perfection of rendering, the idea being completely realized and the effect fairly obtained by appropriate means. There is nothing lacking and nothing in excess; all is precision, harmony, equilibrium.

There is first the proportion between the subject and its setting, which is commonly ignored, it being customary to give to a mere anecdote the proportions suitable to a great historical picture. Then the surroundings are clearly indicated, just sufficiently for the characters to take their places naturally, of their own accord as it were, and in their proper light.

These characters are fully presented, with those traits emphasized which are significant and of the first importance. The moral being is already shown in the description of his physical traits, and he further reveals himself the moment he begins to speak and act.

Maupassant possesses, in an eminent degree, the gift of narration, which is indeed a gift of the

race, — that art by which an incident, whether it be tragic or comic, is made to evolve itself, in the natural order, towards a rapid *dénouement*. He transforms himself with such nimbleness into each one of his characters in turn; he brings us into such close intimacy with them, that nothing which concerns them can leave us indifferent, so that we come to feel a genuine interest in the adventures of Morin's pig and "La Bête à Maître Belhomme."

All is told, besides, in such a clear, simple, and sober style, with such felicity of phrase, — due not to unexpectedness, but to accuracy of expression, — that it seems impossible to have employed other words; and we feel that these could not have been chosen, but must have come of themselves. This style of Maupassant's almost escapes analysis; it will always be the admiration of connoisseurs of the best French speech, and the despair of all seekers after grammatical curiosities.

We might say as much of his stories themselves. The more we appreciate their quality, the less we feel capable of setting it forth at length.

It was Voltaire who said that one did not annotate Racine, because the only possible notes would be, "fine, admirable, sublime!" So, at the end of a number of Maupassant's stories, we should have to write, "This is perfection!"

Maupassant has been compared with La Fontaine; he is a La Fontaine without the lightness

of touch and careless grace — without the wit also. He has been likened to Mérimée; but he is a Mérimée devoid of distinction, without the remote scepticism, and perhaps without the refined cruelty.

But the important thing is not whether he resembles this or that writer, but whether he carries on our literary traditions. He has ancestors in the whole line of writers of purely French stock. His verve goes back to the old Gallic story-tellers and to Villon, who glows with the same sensuous ardor over the beauty of woman, and trembles with the same terror before the spectre of death.

Maupassant has all the traits which characterize the race, and he has no others. There is no foreign infiltration in the clearness of his genius. That fact alone would give him some originality in these days. The limits of his mind are those which the French mind rarely oversteps. Neither dreamer nor mystic, incapable of grasping any over-abstract or complex idea, only moderately sensitive to the play of color, and the music of words, he has a great curiosity for the spectacle of life, and applies himself to reproducing, in their most characteristic aspect, the myriad acts of the ample comedy.

It is with this fund of the French and Gallic temperament that he has traversed modern society.

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Born into a period of excessive civilization and infinite lassitude, he has, by the mere effect of his rude vigor, interpreted, more strongly than any other, a sort of revolt from all works of the intelligence, and likewise the desolation of the human creature reduced to seeing nothing beyond the transformations of matter.

Belonging to a period when literature is less concerned than formerly with the inner life, he has undertaken, above all things, to show the relations of men to each other and to inanimate things.

He has given a representation of life and an expression of art, which, in spite of profound divergencies, arising from the difference of date, rejoin, across the centuries, the realism of the classic masters.



M. PIERRE LOTI.



M. PIERRE LOTI.

IF M. Julien Viaud were asked what he thinks of Pierre Loti, no doubt he would reply, "That is a question I have often asked myself; I know Loti better than any one else can do; I have studied him with the closest and most anxious solicitude, and yet I do not know him thoroughly. He is a very complex being, very unaccountable, and full of contradictions; in a word, a 'queer fellow!'"

We cannot do better, for our part, than to abide by the opinion of Loti's most intimate friend, and seek to discover what some of the contradictions are which make of this literary sailor such a decidedly "queer fellow."

I.

Loti began life as a pure and dreamy child, brought up in a peaceful home-atmosphere. He was born in Saintonge, not in Brittany, as is commonly supposed. He only learned to know Brittany later in life, and, in fact, did not at first care

for it. Time and habit alone made of this Brittany his second country and the home of his adoption. His eyes first rested upon a somewhat colorless horizon, a tranquil nook in a small provincial town, whence he could see the woods of an adjoining estate, La Limoise, which seemed to him as dense and impenetrable as the primeval forest, and, near by, the beach of the island of Oléron. His grandmother, some aged aunts, and a brother and sister much older than himself, conspired to spoil him. He grew up in the midst of all this devotion like a tender, over-pruned shrub, or a hot-house flower.

He was a docile, obedient child, reserved and timid, with courteous little ways; he was pious, too, belonging as he did to a family of austere Protestants; and he announced at the age of eight that he should be a preacher, besides giving evidence of his vocation by his endless scruples of conscience. Gentle and never boisterous, he was more given to day-dreams than to games, and liked playing with little girls best, being something of a little girl himself.

His family, therefore, felt quite at ease about his future. But they counted without heredity; they left out of their reckoning the tendencies inherent in his blood — that blood which had flowed for generations through the veins of hardy sailors.



PIERRE LOTI.

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Strange visions haunted his slumbers, visions of sunlit lands, tropical forests, African deserts, which he divined without ever having seen them, or the memory of which he inherited from his sea-faring ancestors.

When he began to plan his future, and looked about him at the solid men of a certain age who had attained what was considered an enviable position, he could not reconcile himself to the idea of being like them some day, and of "settling down to a useful, sedate, stay-at-home life." An instinctive desire, a longing, awoke in him to go out into the world in search of adventure. He had seen his elder brother set forth for distant seas, and had followed him in imagination to the delicious island of Tahiti. He wished also to go to far-distant climes, to see everything, and explore the whole planet.

In face of this resolution once formed, all resistance and entreaties were alike vain. Before reaching the age of thirty, Loti could say of himself that he had lived the lives of several men, visited every quarter of the globe, committed all manner of follies in every imaginable country, "scorched his skin in the sun and wind of all climates, and sown his wild oats all over the world." But at the same time there remained in this rover, who had seen so much of life, a great deal of the child. Loti reverts constantly to his memories of that period with

a delight which shows that he has not yet grown a stranger to that earlier Loti.

Some of these reminiscences retain a charm for him which we are somewhat at a loss to understand; as, for example, that of the day when he concocted, with his young friends, a delicious omelette out of flies.

He has always remained more or less a child. We see, in the pleasure he takes in describing the outlandish sights and strange costumes of foreign countries, that these motley scenes amuse him just as they do children, with their instinctive taste for the extraordinary. He delights in arraying himself in gorgeous costumes. In Stamboul, where he dons a Turkish dress, he cannot help laughing at his comic-opera air; but on his return to France, he seizes the first occasion to trick himself out in this finery, — himself and his whole family, — for no especial reason except to amuse himself, and without the least fear of ridicule. In the scorn, also, that he affects for civilization as a whole, there is a large element of childishness.

In his very first book, in order to settle his position at once, Loti makes his profession of faith. It is that of the most absolute disenchantment, expressed in terms of the utmost cynicism: —

. . . "Time and dissipation are the two great cure-alls; the heart becomes stupefied at last, and we no longer suffer. . . . There is no God, there

is no morality; nothing exists of all we have been taught to revere; there is simply life, which is passing away; and it is true logic to ask from it all the delight it is capable of giving, while awaiting the final terror of death. The real troubles are sickness, ugliness, and old age; neither you nor I have those troubles to bear yet . . . we can still enjoy life. I will open my heart to you fully, and make you my profession of faith. I have taken as my rule of conduct to do whatever pleases me, in spite of morality and social conventions. I believe in no one and in nothing. I love no one; I have neither faith nor hope." ¹ . . .

Is there a certain bravado, a certain spirit of defiance and bluster, in the expression of these principles of conduct? It is possible; but it seems, nevertheless, as if this were the foundation of Loti's thought. We may set beside these declarations others, gathered from his late books, and the final impression we glean from his entire work.

He believes in nothing besides the immediate reality. All he asks of life is the greatest possible amount of material enjoyment. "Let us lay aside everything else," he says, "and enjoy, as they pass, those things which cannot deceive us, — beautiful human beings, fine horses, delicious gardens, and the perfume of flowers." And yet this

¹ "Azizadé," p. 61.

sceptic dreams of the infinite, this cynic has exquisite delicacies of feeling, this egotist has infinite tenderness. . . .

A fine physique, suppleness of body, muscular strength, — these are the things Loti prizes above all. He has taken pains to develop them in himself by fencing and acrobatic exercises. He quotes with evident satisfaction the remark made to him by a circus-rider, who, seeing that he had muscles like springs of steel, said regretfully: "What a pity, sir, that your education was begun so late!" . . . On the other hand, he is never tired of expressing his disdain for the literary profession and for literature itself. He informs us that he has always experienced an invincible disgust for all printed matter. In the course of his studies, pursued as they were by fits and starts, it was in composition that he invariably failed. Since then he has carefully abstained from all reading; and though he writes, it is without caring at all about the opinion of others, in ignorance of all rules, without the least thought of producing a work of art. . . . Such utter disdain for books may sound puerile to some ears, coming from a man who makes a business of writing books.

But Loti, after all, is not without a system of æsthetics of his own. He knows himself very well; he analyzes and defines with rare precision his especial sort of talent. He takes great pains

to avoid the commonplace; a very laudable aim, but one far removed from the artlessness he professes. This above all is significant, — he has had, from his earliest years, the impulse to commit his thoughts to paper. The “*Journal*,” destined at first merely for his own eye, soon furnished material for narratives intended for publication. Loti begins early to sing his woes, and pour them into the ear of the first passer-by. This desire to talk of himself, to transform the sentimental episodes of his life into material for pretty stories — is it not the sign by which we recognize the born artist? How could Loti escape it? “*Why*,” we may ask him, “have you taken to cultivating your muscles as a solace for your griefs? You may succeed in becoming an acrobat, a clown, or a first-rate shot, but is it not better worth your while to become a great artist?” . . . And that is what Loti is, before all and above all, whatever he may think of the vanity of art. He is an artist, and very much of an artist.

II.

Loti’s work, made up almost exclusively from his personal reminiscences, consists of novels, usually related in the first person, like “*Aziyadé*,” “*Le Roman d’un Spahi*,” “*Le Mariage de Loti*,” “*Madame Chrysanthème* ;” and of stories of travel and confidences, such as “*Fleurs d’En-*

nui," "Propos d'Exil" (containing those admirably simple pages on the death of Admiral Courbet), "Japoneries d'Automne," "Au Maroc," "Le Roman d'un Enfant;" and finally the two books for which it seems as if all the others had been merely a preparation, those books in which Loti's talent gains in breadth, his thought grows tenderer, and at the same time more serious and more truly human; these are "Mon Frère Yves" and "Pêcheur d'Islande."

Loti himself, or in default of him, his friend Plunkett, will unravel for us the secret of the strange flavor of Loti's books: "That which is peculiar to you, and gives to your writing that element of strangeness which takes with the public, is the contempt in which you seem to hold all that is modern; it is the easy independence with which you cast aside all that thirty centuries have brought to humanity, and return to the simple sentiments of primeval man, or to those of the antediluvian animals which haunted the southern seas; only you employ all the skill and research of the highly civilized man to make these sentiments intelligible; and you succeed to a certain extent — that I cannot deny."

This is very clear and very true. It is, indeed, only in the eyes of the over-civilized man that primitive beings seem interesting. It is by comparing their simplicity of soul with his own com-

plex intelligence that he learns to love it. But do we not also see by this from what a conventional standpoint these books set out? The dream of primitive humanity expressed in them is itself the result of a very advanced stage of civilization. They are made on a sort of wager by a *blasé* man of the world.

The only characters we meet in Loti's novels, representing for him the whole human race, are simple beings overflowing with physical vitality; strangers to all thought, like those sailors whose drinking-bouts and orgies, after the restraint of their long voyages, he paints to satiety. Such is the Spahi, Jean Peyral, a peasant of the Cévennes, transplanted to the African deserts and becoming acclimated there; such his vagabonds, like Samuel, Achmet, and a whole series of great savage rascals, — Africans, Polynesians, and the rest. Loti loves them all because they are big and strong; he loves them also for their capacity for devotion — an absolute and spontaneous devotion, like that of a faithful dog, of which more polished folk are not capable. His women approach more closely still, if possible, to primitive humanity; they are children, little slaves, little savages.

Aziyadé is a Circassian slave whom a wealthy old man of Stamboul has bought for his harem. To adorn herself, to smooth and braid her rebellious locks, and tinge her nails with henna, are



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her only occupations. Pasquala Ivanovitch is a girl who tends goats in the mountains of Montenegro.

Rarahu does nothing but bathe in her stream of Apiré, and wind wreaths of flowers with which to deck herself.

In Fatou-gaye there are certain physical traits, such as hands that are a fine black outside with pink palms, strange falsetto intonations of voice, odd poses, strange wild gestures, which disturb the imagination by suggestions of a mysterious kinship.

We can guess what a love-story must be with innamoratas of this sort. Only the senses are engaged. Between Loti and his fair ones, even between Jean Peyral and the pretty little monkey Fatou-gaye, there is an abyss — they are worlds apart in thought, their souls can never come into touch. "I think many things you cannot understand," says Loti to Rarahu. Love between two beings who can have no intellectual sympathy is reduced to the pleasure of the hour. In fact, Loti hardly admits that there can be any higher quality in love.

In this sense he is right when he traces in himself, I know not what phenomenon of far-off heredity, which makes him half Arab in soul, a follower of Islam. His conception of woman, as destined to be a mere plaything for man, is much

nearer to Mahometanism than to the Christian idea.

And if he did but love them, even after his own fashion, these women who are his devoted slaves! But it seems as if the love were all on their side. That is why Loti's stories all end in the same sad way; desertion, faithlessness, death, are their lugubrious finale.

And when Aziyadé is dead, he says: "She, indeed, loved me with the deepest, purest love, and the humblest too; and she died behind the gilded bars of a harem, fading away slowly, gently, of a broken heart, and sending me no message of complaint. I can still hear her serious voice saying to me, "I am only a little Circassian slave . . . but thou, O Loti! Yes, go if thou wilt, do according to thy pleasure."

Rarahu, too, dies like an abandoned child, and her fall and her early death are doubly the fault of Loti. We see what the results are of putting in practice the "simple human sentiments." De-spoiled of all borrowed prestige, these sensuous idyls are merely vulgar and displeasing narratives — every-day stories of unions without love followed by desertion — newspaper incidents in all their repellent commonplace. There is little that is beautiful about humanity reduced to its simplest expression. And by this we can measure the whole extent of Loti's art. We can under-

stand all he must have added to these commonplace episodes which was not necessarily involved in them, in order to make their recital so poignant—steeped and impregnated as it is with poetry.

III.

We must repeat that the exotic element has a great part in the charm of Loti's stories. It seems, at the first glance, as if all this motley Orientalism, this Japanese, Chinese, and Turkish coloring, were only laid on to catch the eye and gratify an idle curiosity. But it has another and more real advantage in that it completely alters our horizon. We cannot fancy, without a slight embarrassment, what the marriage of Loti would be transported to a familiar scene—the Batignolles quarter, for instance; but amidst exotic scenery we are less inclined to be shocked. Distance softens, attenuates, and blurs the outlines of things.

Are these pictures of foreign manners correct? It has been denied. But the question is quite idle and meaningless, since Loti is neither an historian nor an anthropologist, but a poet. He merely uses the memories he has brought back from his journeys around the world as suitable frames in which to set his dreams.

What is essential with Loti, what gives its true character to his work, is the atmosphere of naturalistic poetry in which it is steeped. Loti is a

worshipper of nature in the sense in which the ancients understood the word — creative nature, the source of life — the one living and eternal Isis, whom Lucretius sang. It is towards her that he has felt drawn from childhood by an unconscious pantheism. The double mystery of the immensity and the eternity of nature filled him with awe and plunged him in ecstasy. He yearned to draw near to her — to “this terrifying nature with the myriad faces.” He has seen her, having journeyed over all the paths of earth that he might gaze on her; he has made her his, and brought her, in all her fulness, into his works. For he has the gift of painting with words, and composing pictures whose magic no painter can equal.

He does not confine himself, in his descriptions, to reproducing clearly the details of objects about him, he excels also in reproducing the impression of the whole, in bringing out, as it were, the soul of a country.

If we follow him to Senegal, the impression we receive continuously, which penetrates us little by little, and takes hold upon us, is that of a savage nature, unfriendly to man, with its sun that blazes without respite, its arid deserts of sand, and its poison-laden atmosphere.

If he carries us to Tahiti, the delicious island, he brings before our eyes the image of an earthly paradise, a land of eternal spring, with soft and

perfumed airs, whose trees cast no treacherous shadows, whose plants have no deadly juices, where the animals are harmless, and men, being without wants, can live without toil; where life flows by, all indolence and enchantment, in a luxurious dream. And we ourselves, lulled by the music of his language, enveloped by the charm of harmonious words, feel ourselves borne far away, beneath other skies, and lose the sense of the narrow horizons shutting us in.

We are sometimes tempted to believe that the art of description has reached such a point, thanks to the efforts of the picturesque writers, that there is no further progress to be made. This is doubtless true, so far as rendering the exact outline of objects, their coloring and relief, is concerned.

In this respect Loti has not improved on his predecessors, perhaps he has been less successful than they. But what no one had achieved before, was to make visible that which had no exact outline, no form even, no definite color, but was made up of uncertain harmonies and indefinite shades. Such is this description of a night in the equatorial seas: —

“Even the nights were luminous. When all was slumbering in heavy immobility, in dead silence, the stars shone out above, more dazzling than in any other region of earth, and the sea also was illumined from beneath. There was a sort

of immense gleam diffused over the waters; the lightest motion, such as the slow gliding of the boat, or a shark darting after it, brought out upon the warm eddies gleams like the color of a fire-fly. Then, over the great phosphorescent mirror of the deep, there were millions of wild flames—they were like little lamps lighting themselves everywhere, burning mysteriously for a second or two, then dying out. These nights were swooning with heat, full of phosphorescence; and in all this dim immensity light was brooding, and all these waters held latent life, in a rudimentary state, as did formerly the gloomy waters of the primeval world.”¹

Or better still, this description of the light in Iceland, where he seeks to give the idea of a nameless atmosphere that is neither night nor day: “Outside it was daylight, perpetual daylight. But it was a pale, pale light, resembling nothing else; it threw dim reflections over everything, as of a dead sun, and beyond these, all was an immense void without color; everything outside the planks of the ship seeming diaphanous, impalpable, unreal.

“The eye could scarcely distinguish the sea. First it took on the aspect of a sort of trembling mirror, with no image reflected in it; as it spread further it seemed to become a vaporous plain, and

¹ “*Mon Frère Yves*,” p. 73.

beyond this there was nothing — no outline nor horizon.

“The damp freshness of the air was more intense, more penetrating, than actual cold; and in breathing it one was conscious of a taste of brine. All was calm, and it was no longer raining; above, formless, colorless clouds seemed to hold that latent, unexplained light; one could see plainly, while conscious all the time that it was night, and all these pallors were of no shade that can be named.”¹

We feel how unsuitable is the term I used just now of a power of “description.” What we should call it is a marvellous talent for evocation. Loti does not experience, like so many writers, any necessity for torturing the language; he uses only everyday words. But these words, as used by him, take on a value we did not know they possessed; they awaken sensations that linger deeply within us; they evoke before us visions that reach far, very far, even beyond the limits of the visible.

The poetry of nature is always a poetry of disenchantment, since it brings us ceaselessly into the presence of that mother of all beings, who is a blind and soulless mother, carrying on her endless work without caring for us; and since it perpetually recalls the thought that we are mere atoms in a boundless universe.

¹ “Pêcheur d’Islande,” p. 11.

Loti has in a rare degree this sentiment of the immensity in which we are lost. Many times in the course of his sailor-life he has had before him, day after day, infinite stretches of sea and sky. He tells us that every morning he employs his first waking moments in asking himself in what corner of the world he is; whether in our old Europe or somewhere "below the horizon."

He is haunted by the immensity of time, too, by an undefined impression of the vast antiquity of things, by the vague conception of eras anterior to himself. He reflects on the countless eyes that have already gazed upon the scenes we are looking at to-day. He discovers in himself far-away and mysterious influences, reflections of the thoughts of his forefathers, a part of himself belonging already to the dead past. . . . And then, the little that we are is escaping us day by day. All crumbles, melts away, and slips from our hands. What poignant emotions, what old adventures, we have forgotten! What familiar spots, what beloved faces, are forever lost to us! How soon will come the final catastrophe and the terror of death—and afterwards? . . . Is there an afterwards? How can we conceive of a morrow to this life? We shall be but the dust of dust, and with us, civilizations will have disappeared, races become extinct, but the great aspects of nature will remain the same, eternally radiant through countless

ages. . . . That is why the last word of this poetry is a longing for nothingness, "a vague *nowhere*, made up of universal unconsciousness and absolute annihilation. How beautiful that would be! Whether this nothingness exist or not, I love it, this eternal, dreamless sleep, sweeter than all dreams."¹

IV.

All these elements — the poetry of nature, a deep melancholy, the art of description, the gift of evocation — are what charm us in "Mon Frère Ives" and "Pêcheur d'Islande." These two books, however, occupy a place apart in Loti's works. They represent, as it were, a "second manner," which, it seems, the author has since renounced; since he has confined himself, in his later books, to descriptions which are, after all, mere descriptions, and do not escape the reproach of becoming somewhat tiresome in the long run.

But in these two books Loti struck a new note; he laid aside his display of cynicism, his deliberate irony; he attained to real emotion and a genuine sympathy. He has let himself be touched by the sentiment of universal brotherhood in suffering, by a profound and tender pity; and we are heartily one with him and with the beings whose misery he shows us, so like our own.

¹ "Fleurs d'Ennui," p. 22.

Even the scene has changed ; we are still carried over the vast stage of the world ; and, like his brother Loti, Ives, on waking, never feels quite sure, within a thousand miles or so, where he is, in what part of the globe ; and confounds one fête-day with other similar ones he has celebrated in America, or in some Chinese port, at Buenos Ayres, Rosario, or Hong-Kong. But this time there is a centre that does not change, as a spot of earth to which one returns, or where one hopes at least to return and dwell. It is that sad, monotonous Brittany, whose peculiar fascination Loti so well understands — that intimate charm to which we are at first insensible, but which in the end takes entire possession of us.

At Plouherzel, at Pors Even, there are mothers, wives, sweethearts, and there are familiar haunts, remembered nooks, amid the old walls and the old trees. That is why, when these adventurers set foot once more upon this corner of earth where all their tenderness has taken root, they lay aside their reckless, dare-devil airs, and become once more, what they have never ceased to be at heart, great children.

These big children, these simple, poor, humble people — how truly Loti loves them ! It is not a mere sentimentalizing over their miseries ; sentimentalizing, as we know, is not loving. The only sympathy of any value in literature is that which

puts the writer into intimate relations with his characters, and interests him in the smallest details of their lives, so penetrating him with their real meaning that he can make a moving chronicle out of these petty facts, which to another might seem insignificant and worthless. It is this sort of sympathy which makes Loti discover so much in the yellow leaves of a sailor's log-book. He reads beneath the figures, names, and dates accumulated there, a whole poem of adventure and ill-fortune, — the first thoughtless years spent in buffeting the winds and scrambling up the mast, the more troubled years that follow, when the first pangs of love lead by turns to artless day-dreams and to brutal orgies, to terrible awakenings of the heart and senses, and furious revolts, followed by a return to the ascetic life of the open seas; and always that dream of retiring at last, to live a calm and virtuous life in some village-home — a dream which all sailors indulge from their earliest years, and so few ever realize.¹

If you wish to appreciate the effects of this artistic sympathy, compare Ives Kermadec with a character whom he resembles in many respects, the Coupeau of M. Zola. Both of them, Ives and Coupeau, are pursued by the same hereditary love of drink; an instinct, coming down from their forefathers, seems to force them to it; and, in

¹ "Mon Frère Ives," pp. 3, 272.

both alike, drunkenness arouses a creature who is not themselves — a savage brute. But while the author of "L'Assommoir" takes pleasure in the spectacle of the gradual brutalizing of the zinc-worker, Coupeau, and appears to be triumphant when the evil instinct has at last accomplished its fatal work, these same things, as told by Loti, are poignant and sorrowful, the phases of a sad drama, which bring into conflict this hereditary scourge and poor Ives's good resolutions, constantly renewed and as constantly vanquished.

I know of no pages more aglow with patriotic feeling than the recital of the death of Sylvestre, the boyish hero of Tonquin. And indeed no other has celebrated as Loti has done, obscure heroes such as he, and their inglorious devotion.

In "Le Roman d'un Spahi" we find these lines, which recall the language in which the ancients bade farewell to warriors dying for their country: "They performed prodigies of endurance and valor, these poor Spahis, in their final defence. The combat inflamed them, as it does all who are courageous by nature, born braves. They sold their lives dearly, these men, all young, vigorous, and inured to war; and in a few short years they will be forgotten, even at Fort Saint-Louis. Who will recite the names of those who fell in the land of Diambour, on the fields of Dialakur?"

And then what figures Loti has drawn of suffering and resigned women, like Grandmamma Moan, Marie Keremenen, and that little Gaud, so noble and so pure! Moreover, he has never carried his literary art further than in these stories. They are both composed with the greatest freedom, and yet with supreme skill; this has not been sufficiently noticed. Loti has understood well how to steep "Mon Frère Yves" in the "great monotony of the sea;" and the pictures that make up "Pêcheur d'Islande," in which he has employed only the most veiled and sober tints, combine to keep the whole work in the same key of tender melancholy.

v.

What place must be assigned to Loti in the ranks of contemporary literature? If we are to believe him, his work eludes all attempt at classification.

"I own myself incapable of ranking you in any known class of writers," observes the *complaisant* Plumkett in "Fleurs d'Ennui." "You are very individual, — yourself and no other; and no one will ever succeed in labelling you until specialists in brain diseases, palæontologists and veterinaries, who treat sick whales amidst the swell of southern seas, take to literary criticism. See the white blackbird, for instance; they told him he was a

magpie, they told him he was a jay, they told him he was a ring-dove — nothing of the sort; he was a creature by himself. So with you, my dear Loti; you are absolutely unique in your way, you belong to no known class of bird.”¹

If Plunkett means to say that Loti is a very individual, thoroughly original writer, he is quite correct; but he hardly needed to go to such a great expense in metaphors to tell us this. Perhaps, however, this navy officer, who seems to care little about criticism, and to know still less, is not aware that in literature there exists no such thing as a “creature by himself.” There are not only the influences of the moment, but there are other more remote influences from which no writer can escape.

Loti carries on, with us, the tradition of exotic literature. He owes much to Bernadin de St.-Pierre and to Chateaubriand. It matters little whether he has read these authors; and since he seems to attach importance to the point, let us admit that he has not read them. It is not through their books alone that the influence of great writers is propagated.

In fact, we might in this case go still farther back, to the father of all the imaginative and disenchanted souls of our century. For this return, which Loti seeks to make to the “primitive in-

¹ “Fleurs d’Ennui,” p. 105.

stincts of man," what is it but a variation of that dream of a return to a "state of nature" which haunted Rousseau?

Loti owes much to the picturesque writers who, little by little, have made our language pliant, have enriched it, and enabled it to sound so many new notes. He owes much to the realists, who have taught him a concern for expressive detail; and perhaps his books would not have held so many common sailors and humble folk, if other writers had not brought workingmen and humble folk into their books. . . . Finally, is not the fact that Loti's novels so speedily found a host of admirers a proof that they had come at their appointed hour, and were the sign of a prevailing attitude of mind? That complexity which Loti notes in himself, is the same from which all the men of his generation appear to be suffering. He, like them, is disgusted with a worn-out civilization, curious of new sensations, and yet bored by them; tired of others, and still more of himself, and longing for eternal nothingness.

Like them he seeks to delude himself by a mirage of simplicity, by an illusion of *naïveté*; in short, he is a true child of the end of the century.

Loti's great merit is in having refreshed this literature of the world-weary, by filling it with dreams, and reconciling it with poetry.



M. EDOUARD ROD.





M. EDOUARD ROD.

IN the course of the last fifteen years a complete revolution has taken place in our literature. About the year 1880 naturalism and positivism were the ruling forces. Writers were attentive only to externals, caring less for persons than for things. They took account only of facts, without seeking to penetrate their meaning; and they set aside all problems whose solution could not be drawn from experience. They wished to see nothing, and perhaps really did see nothing, beyond immediate realities. But a system so narrow and factitious could not long prevail. Little by little we have seen the revival in literature of all that had been thus unduly banished from it. Our authors have learned anew that facts are nothing, apart from the ideas which produce and explain them, and of which they are but the incomplete realization; and thus that inner life, which alone gives value to the outer, has been reinstated in all its rights, and we have grown aware once more that we have a *soul*. A keen interest

has sprung up in the varied phenomena of conscience; and the belief has revived that our intellectual activities have an aim beyond themselves, and must develop in accordance with those laws, whose formulas may vary, but which are founded on eternal morality. It has even been claimed that this morality can only exert its full power when based upon some supernatural sanction.

Thus it will be seen that in a brief space of time we have retraced, one by one, the steps taken in our preceding march. This transformation in modern thought, which the writers now in middle life have been active in bringing about, may be traced through the writings of M. Edouard Rod.

This is their first element of interest for us; but they have, besides, a value of their own, quite independent of the tendencies of which they are a sign.

M. Rod, who has been a laborious and prolific writer, is still young, and his mind is constantly enriching itself. In proportion as he acquires new ideas, he develops at the same time a clearer sense of his own individuality. His talent, which has never ceased to grow, is to-day fully formed and master of itself. The moment is perhaps well chosen, therefore, for sketching the physiognomy of the writer.

M. Rod introduces us somewhere to an excellent friend of his, whom, in order not to reveal his real



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name, he calls Jacques. "He is a grave man," he tells us, "little given to jesting, with a mind of more solidity than charm. Having a highly developed taste for truth and absolute sincerity, he never expresses himself on any subject without a prudent reserve." This sincerity, combined with simplicity, attracts us at once toward Jacques, and yet we are conscious of a certain barrier between him and ourselves. In the turn of his mind and his habits of thought, he reveals somewhat different influences from those prevailing amongst us. He has passed his youth in a country adjacent to France, which yet is not France. He has studied in gymnasia, whose curriculum differs from that of our classical colleges, and has been one of their professors, having occupied the chair of foreign literature in the University of Geneva. He is, in short, a Swiss university man, and a Protestant. Not that he has remained an adherent of that dogma; he cherishes, indeed, scant tenderness for the religion in which he was brought up. He scoffs, whenever he finds an opportunity, or can make one, at "that rationalizing religion, made up of a compromise between dogma and common sense, whose glacial services consist chiefly of an interminable sermon, delivered in a sanctimonious voice, with awkward gestures and a whining accent — that religion which argues instead of loving." But so firmly riveted

are certain chains, that it is in vain we flatter ourselves on having completely broken them; we remain prisoners for life of the creed which first fashioned our souls — we may lose the faith, but not the cast of mind. The example of Edmond Scherer, to cite no other, is a case in point.

But to return to Jacques. Having left Geneva for Paris, he creates there, at once, a little province of his own, in the image of his native town. He lives in absolute retirement amidst his books and his dreams; he avoids noisy assemblies, and does not seek the salons where conversation flourishes. His own conversation is all on one plane, rich rather in forcible ideas than in felicitous expressions. He has a horror of paradox; irony disquiets, and fancy startles him. Does this Jacques, who resembles neither the man of the world, the loungeur of the Boulevards, nor even the average man-of-letters among us, exactly resemble M. Edouard Rod? He is certainly such as we like to picture to ourselves the author of the "Road to Death," "Moral Ideas of our Time," and the "Life of Michel Tessier."

That which constitutes the superiority of literature over every other form of mental activity is that it gives play to the greatest diversity of mental gifts. Certain writers are painters and musicians as well, composing symphonies with words in the place of sounds and colors; in short, they are

artists. M. Rod is not of these, or rather, he is their exact opposite. The sentiment of art in all degrees, and under all forms, is completely wanting in him. Harmony of line, and effects of light, in nature leave him indifferent. "It is not landscape beauty which takes hold upon me," he says; "the outward world is not my master, and its aspects in themselves have little attraction for me." The masterpieces of painting have no greater power of arousing his enthusiasm. He is of opinion that "the sublimest of them are not worth the humblest idea that germinates in our own brains, or the slightest emotion that sets our hearts throbbing for a moment." Only those works of art can thrill him which allow the thought to shine through, drawing and coloring serving as almost immaterial symbols. This is the case with the English Pre-Raphaelites, and of them he speaks with heartfelt warmth and sympathy. In the same way he seeks in the works of his favorite authors, less for expression and style than for the intellectual content. On the other hand, he does not place himself at the point of view of the psychologist, curious of the play of ideas and sentiments. It is not enough for him that a sensation should be rare to make it worthy of study; curiosities of analysis do not tempt him; the disinterested scrutiny of the scientist is as remote from him as the indifferent glance of the dilettante. But he finds, in our com-

mon nature, certain innate ideas by which we judge whether an act be good or bad. Whence comes this notion of Good and Evil? How is it formed in us? What various interpretations do we give it? And how do we see men conduct themselves in their differing modes of applying it? Is this life, which has been imposed on us, worth living? What is its meaning? and what constitutes its value? What satisfaction may we give to the instinct which leads us to the pursuit of happiness? How conciliate this instinct with an ideal of morality? Such are the questions unceasingly present to the mind of M. Edouard Rod. It is in order to find this solution and impart it to us, that he writes his books. He is essentially a moralist.

We should never have suspected it, however, from reading the book by which he made his *début*. "Palmyre Veulard" is dedicated to the author of "Nana;" and this dedication is but the just homage of the disciple to his master. The story is that of a courtesan, who, finding her charms on the wane, makes haste to end the days of a consumptive millionaire by pleasure and dissipation, in order that she may inherit his fortune; then, after a few more escapades, she becomes the wife of a bully in a dress-suit, who ruins and beats her. Such is the edifying narrative which M. Edouard Rod has chosen for his first story. In this vast universe of infinitely varied spectacles, it was the

corner in which these pretty scenes were passing which seemed to him worth describing first of all. He described it, therefore, according to the formulas of his school. He showed himself conscientiously brutal and systematically indecent.

To tell the truth, his mistake does not altogether offend us; it is not without a saving grace, presenting as it does a fine example of literary fervor. M. Rod was scarcely past childhood when he rushed into the career of letters; with that enthusiasm which the youth of our day are fast unlearning, he yielded to that rage for imitation which is the first symptom of a literary tendency.

He dutifully ranged himself behind the master who seemed to him the most gifted, without asking himself whether there was any sympathy of talent between them, from the mere necessity of having a master. We have here a perfect instance of the deplorable contagion of certain literary successes, and of how the example of these noisy reputations may suffice to mislead young men of talent once and for all.

M. Rod, however, was not long in discovering his error. His whole nature protested against the tendencies of naturalism; and, at the same time, help came to him from other quarters, enabling him to regain possession of himself.

Other influences, more in accord with the turn of his mind, delivered him from this first baleful

one. It is interesting to take account of these influences, because they have been at work equally upon most of the writers of the same period. They are, above all, foreign influences. In a cosmopolitan city like Geneva, M. Rod was especially exposed to them. Leopardi and Schopenhauer taught him to reflect upon those general conditions which sway the life of man. The music of Wagner, the theories and works of the Pre-Raphaelites, and the verse of the English poets, acted in the same direction, revealing to him a form of art in which the sentiment is suggested rather than expressed; where the idea is not enclosed within too rigid outlines. The Russian novelists, by the sincerity of their apostleship, recalled to him the band of men who, in the dawn of Christianity, preached a religion of love and charity. And he found besides, even among us, excellent guides to lead him into these new realms of thought and expression. In the first place there was M. de Voguë, whose book upon Russian fiction he salutes as a revelation; next, M. Paul Bourget, who, in his "Essays in Psychology," analyzes with such keen penetration, and throws such a vivid light upon certain hitherto undefined states of the contemporary soul. This mental training led him to conceive of a new type of fiction, stripped of all that he calls "dross," a term which has been applied in every period to those beauties of art that have

ceased to please. There were to be no more of those descriptive passages, so minute and useless, so tedious and illusory, taking up much space and explaining nothing; no more of those retrospective narratives, with their stereotyped views upon childhood, youth, and education; no more *scenes* of an artificial and theatrical order. The characters are not to have too marked an individuality, nor are the facts with which they have to deal to be too concrete. This is to be a purely inward romance, from which outward circumstances are banished, and which goes on within the heart. The writer shall look into himself, but not after the manner of those egoists who love only themselves. In literature observation is of value in proportion as it rises above the individual to man in the abstract; or rather it is the double law of this inward observation that it looks at the particular only to discover the general. M. Rod says this, with rare felicity of expression: —

“ We lose our time when we count our own heart-beats, but not when we listen to the vibrating echo of the infinite succession of human hearts.”

This method, which consists in studying one's self, not in order to know or love ourselves, but that we may know and love others, M. Rod has tried to baptize with the name of “ Intuitivism.” The word has not been a success, in spite of ending in “ ism,” and of being brought to our notice

in a preface, and printed in capital letters. For alas, it is not sufficient for the success of a literary watchword that it should be pedantic; it must also be intelligible, and this one has not that merit. It may also be said that the works to which it served as a label have not achieved any dazzling success. But the system was good. The novel of which the theory has been thus sketched was, in fact, a reproduction of the "Journal Intime," but without the pretentiousness, the vanity, and puerility that usually make this style of composition intolerable. Here we have "confidences" deprived of those piquant details and personal anecdotes that the makers of confidences are wont to affect, and their readers to delight in.

In the history which the writer gives us here of his soul, he relates nothing but those successive aspects under which life has appeared to him. It is on this system that he has composed the trilogy of "The Road to Death," "The Meaning of Life," and "The Three Hearts;" triple stages of a voyage of discovery into the secret of life.

"The Road to Death" dates from the period when the doctrines of pessimism found a degree of favor among us, against which all the partisans of the old French gayety vied in protestations. It is a commentary in three hundred pages on the oft-quoted words of Ecclesiastes. Life is monotonous, it says, always the same, and always dis-

appointing. The objects towards which all our activity tends are unworthy of the efforts they cost us.

What is glory? A sound of words that endures for a time, and is destined to perish with human speech. What is real in human happiness, unless perhaps the disappointments that attend upon it? From one end of the universe to the other, since there have been men, and they have thought, there has gone up one cry of misery, which fills all space, and swells with time. All societies and all civilizations have complained of the suffering of life. This arises from the fact that evil is at the bottom of all things, the only reality, while good is a conception of our own minds. And were it even in our power to augment the sum of good, or diminish that of evil! But with what we call progress, this suffering goes on ceaselessly increasing. The human soul only grows in order that it may offer a vaster field for sorrow; as it becomes more complicated and more refined, the stings of life do but penetrate deeper, and inflict more subtle wounds. Thus sadness is not a mere passing mood with us, and our disquietudes have no fleeting cause. It is not such or such an episode of life that torments us, but life itself. Nothing is wanting, as we see, to this profession of despair, which culminates as its logical conclusion in the desire for universal annihilation.

M. Rod loves to repeat that, of all his books, this one remains his favorite. This does not surprise us. In the first place, among those emotional experiences through which we must all pass, the saddest always remain the dearest to us. Thus also, though experience may have brought to our author a firmer poise and greater serenity of soul, yet, as to the substance of things, his ideas have never changed.

And, in truth, the pessimism, which is found in the depths of all great works, and to which the most clear-sighted spirits have given their allegiance, this pessimism is true. We may readily admit as much, but it is customary to assume that the acceptance of this doctrine disarms us for existence. This, according to M. Rod, is an error. The pessimist lives the life of other men; he differs from them only in judging it. Still, we contest the right of the *young* to be pessimists. Whence comes, we ask, this weariness of travellers who tire of their journey before setting out on it? Whence this discouragement of wrestlers who have never tried a throw? We appeal therefrom to the testimony of those who have had a longer experience of life, and we assure ourselves that their evidence is less disheartening. And yet, after all, M. Rod assures us it is in the soul of the young that pessimism is sure to break forth with the violence of a cataclysm. When the day

comes for him, who has known the world only through his dreams, and the illusions with which he has draped it, to see the veil suddenly torn aside and behold life in its naked reality, the discovery is certainly one never to be forgotten. But he whose energies are forever shattered by such an experience, was not capable of becoming a man. He has only his own weakness of character and faltering will to blame. Men of a strong will-power and virile intelligence invent motives for attaching themselves to life, and by a free creative impulse of their own minds give worth and meaning to it. This is the method which Pascal recommended long ago. There is no other. And perhaps a man, by attaching himself to the aim he has thus chosen in life, and magnifying its importance and value, may attain to the full exercise of all his faculties; and this is what we call happiness. In this sense we may say that every man is the artisan of his own happiness, and that the first condition of being happy is to *will* to be so. It is when we live only for ourselves, that it were as well not to live. And yet a man naturally fears to bind another existence to his own. He dreads marriage, with its bondage and its pledges. He fears to alienate his independence, when he ought, on the contrary, to be in haste to end his isolation. He distrusts paternity until the day comes when, through the experience of its very anguish, he

discovers its blessings. Then he finds out that his point of view in regard to life has wholly changed. Those advantages which he once declared to be not worth striving for, are no longer to be despised, now that he seeks them for others. Death, which once he would not have lifted his hand to avoid, he now regards with dread, in his longing to turn it aside from the heads of those dear to him; and he feels with surprise a new anxiety as to his own safety, since other precious lives are dependent on his. Those perplexing questions as to our duties and the rights of others, over which he had tormented himself in vain, now take on a clear significance. Others have rights over us, those which we ourselves have given them, and we in turn have definite duties toward them. Woe to him who is alone! For no man here below is his own true end. Health, fame, riches, when we seek them for ourselves, are so much vanity. But when we apply their benefits to others, these false goods and vain joys assume a concrete and tangible reality. This is the fixed goal, and those who have attained it have found repose. But alas, repose is not a condition of our lot, and those are least adapted for it to whom nature has been most prodigal of her gifts. The human soul dreams ever of expansion. Like Ariel, it asks for more space; it cries out, like the dying poet, for "more light." The circle of

the family affections is limited. Is it not possible for us to rise beyond it? Devotion to the few beings nearest to us is merely a superior form of egotism. Can we not attain to the disinterested joys of altruism? We are conscious that we have not exhausted all the possibilities of our destiny as men, until our sympathies embrace all mankind. Certain of our fellow-beings have attained this height, and have been named apostles, martyrs, saints; these had faith. But in the absence of that faith which we have lost, can we not find among the laws that science has formulated, or among the conceptions that have enriched the human mind, the pedestal we need to raise us to this height of love for humanity? We proceed to make a religion of the progress of the species.

“But since the progress of the whole is built upon the suffering of the individual, this appears to me one of those commonplaces, invented by minds of little subtlety, in order that others, less subtle still, may impose them on human credulity.” Again, we invoke the principle of the solidarity of mankind. “But every day the world commits acts in which I refuse to assume complicity. Nor is it merely the criminal soul which is alien to mine, but the soul of mankind in general, ignorant of my anxieties, indifferent to my cares.”

And now, in these last days, mankind has discovered the religion of suffering. But this reli-

gion appeals to us no more than the others; its dogmas are equally inaccessible to us. It is not enough to open our eyes to the miseries of the race in order to awaken the impulse to relieve them. This universal pity, to which we are summoned, and which we cannot withhold, remains inefficacious after all, because it lacks the true leaven of religion. And thus M. Rod's whole argument tends to the admission of the necessity, and at the same time the impossibility, of faith.

In the closing pages of "The Meaning of Life," and by way of conclusion, M. Rod has transcribed the words of the Lord's Prayer, which his hero murmurs with his lips, but it is with his lips only. This marks precisely the point where the literary mind stops in this modern movement for a spiritual revival. Unable to satisfy himself with the negations of the preceding period, the writer of the day lends himself undoubtedly to this positive current, which, indeed, he has helped to create and labored to strengthen; but he does not abandon himself to this "stream of tendency."

He knows the limits he may not overpass. He may have friends among those who style themselves neo-Christians, but he is not of them. His reason is too exacting to content itself with effusions of sentiment; his intelligence is too wide-awake to pay itself with words. He stops short at the desire, the aspiration, toward a faith that

can never be his. There remains to him love, such as the poets have sung it. This love can so easily become the object of life, filling it to overflowing, that those who have once known its power lose their taste for all beside, and many have been ready to die for it. But one must first meet such a love, and nothing differs from it more than the shallow counterfeits that are adorned with its name. Man exhausts himself in pursuing its shadow through a life of trivial adventures. But where are all those joys he has promised himself, the ecstasies from which he awaited an expansion of his being, the rapture in which he had dreamed of losing himself? He remains his own master, perfectly clear-sighted, and, with his mind ever on the alert, he measures the distance separating the ideal he had conceived from the reality it has been given him to grasp. Perhaps it is that the poets have lied, imposing on us a figment of their imagination, an illusion born of the play of words and the music of their rhythm; or perhaps the age of love has passed, and humanity has grown too reflective, too self-conscious, to lose itself in emotion. "Sentiments transform themselves as well as ideas, and the *love* of to-day no more resembles that of yesterday than our political forms resemble those of the past." Intelligence attenuates love at the same time that she embellishes it; bathes it in neutral tints; purges away its violence, its

excesses, its dross. Intelligence cultivates love like a rare flower, refining upon its shape and perfume; descends on it and reasons with it, adding to it another charm in the magic of beautiful thoughts she weaves about it. The love which is thus described to us, into which the intelligence enters as much at least as the heart, in which the senses play almost no part, is simply a very sweet and tender affection, more akin to friendship than to passion. With this we must apparently content ourselves, being born too late into a world grown old. Thus, under its double aspect, the malady of the age is one, proceeding from the same causes: we can no longer believe, and we no longer know how to love.

Such was the road which the thought of M. Rod had travelled before he ventured to attack living realities. He had meditated deeply on the conditions of our lot, and the various moods of the soul in our day, and his meditations had been confined to the abstract. The ideas which we have attempted to summarize are not all personal to him; some of them are derived from the books he has read. M. Rod has read much. He can say of himself in the words of one of his heroes: "My brain is full of books." The same personage remarks in an off-hand manner, somewhat startling to our indolence: "I have brought my favorite books with me, the five or six hundred volumes

in which the history of human thought is stored up, and which are sufficient for the curiosity of a lifetime." Five or six hundred volumes indeed! That is a good many books to keep at one's bedside. But it does not matter, or rather it is a good thing to begin by letting the thoughts of others awaken our thoughts. Above all, it is singularly profitable for the mind to embrace, from the outset, large horizons, and give itself to general speculations before settling down to the study of particular cases. M. Rod's labors as a critic and moralist have been an excellent preparation for his special work as a novelist. In that work we shall find an originality for which we were somewhat unprepared. "The Sacrificed," "The Private Life of Michel Tessier," "The Second Life of Michel Tessier," and "Silence" are "books of passion," perhaps the only ones to be found in the literature of our day, fertile though this is in love-stories. The novelty of these books consists in their having broken with the regular *dramatis personæ* of the love-story. And when we come to think of it, what a set of ordinary types and poor specimens of humanity they are whom the novelists are forever setting before us! On the one hand, we have the bourgeois Don Juan, the only employment of whose faculties is a perpetual love-chase, and who, because he chases love, always fails to find it; so that the list of his con-

quests is a mere schedule of his disappointments. Then, as a mate to him, we have what was once the "*femme incomprise*," but has blossomed into the neurotic heroine of our day, a lady whose perversities seem to be an enigma, forever tempting and forever baffling the novelist of the period. Is it not possible, by the way, that this enigma may be much less obscure than he would have us believe? and may not these disquieting perversities of hers be made up, after all, of quite simple and vulgar elements? However this may be, it is certain that true passion seems always to elude these professional lovers.

But there exist beings of another order, according to M. Rod, — beings unsullied by a life of pleasure, who have kept intact an energy of nature of which they are hardly aware themselves; and who, being endowed with true nobility of soul, are incapable of the compromises which protect the average mortal from great catastrophes. Souls like these scorn to lead a double life, which respects propriety while violating duty. They count for nothing those pleasures of the senses which leave the heart empty, and disdain to attach themselves by ties which may be lightly broken. Too generous for reserves, they pledge themselves wholly, and exact no less than they give. It is the best in them — their disinterestedness, their absolute sincerity — which causes their ruin, leav-

ing them disarmed against dangers of which they have no suspicion, and which seize them unawares. The best we can wish for natures like these, is that they may carry out of life, unsuspected, the treasure of ardent feeling wrapped up in their hearts; for, once they begin pouring it forth, they cannot stop half-way, but must travel their road to the end, even though that road may be bordered with ruins, and lead to a Calvary.

In "The Sacrificed," Dr. Morgex loves Clotilde Audouin, who is the wife of his friend. There exists between these two only a happy congeniality of soul; the thought of wrong has never visited them. But destiny has ironies of temptation, and entangles our wills in subtle and inextricable nets. Audouin, who is a man of a sanguine complexion, much addicted to the pleasures of the table, is suddenly stricken with apoplexy; then a gradual paralysis sets in to torture his poor frame. Morgex cares for him with the most scrupulous devotion. But at last there comes a day, when, carried away by a sudden aberration of mind, or yielding to the secret promptings of the tempter within, he administers to his patient as much morphine as the latter calls for, which is the precise amount required to kill him. Some time later Morgex marries Madame Audouin. But will he be happy? Can he enjoy a happiness purchased by an act with which his conscience reproaches him as

a crime? No; remorse takes hold on him, and leaves him no repose. In vain he seeks to exorcise it by calling to his aid all the sophistries that might have availed with so many others. At last, to rid himself of his secret, he confides it to a magistrate, who does not hesitate to pronounce him innocent. But a sensitive conscience is amenable only to its inward tribunal, or in other words, to the tribunal of God. In the sight of absolute justice, Morgex is guilty; he must expiate. He leaves his companion,—she it is who is the *Sacrificed*,—and brings to a melancholy end an existence which might have been a tranquil and happy one.

Michel Tessier, who gives his name to the succeeding novel, is happily married to the best of wives, and has two charming daughters. He is a man of the highest standing in the country, being a leader of the Catholic party and the eloquent defender of religion and morality, as well as the advocate of all high interests and noble causes. He is universally respected; and all agree that what constitutes his force is the perfect accord between his actions and opinions, the dignity of his conduct, and the absolute unity of his life—alas for the falsity of appearances! This admirable party-chief, this orator of spotless integrity, this devoted father and model husband, is merely the unhappy lover of a young girl. The morality of

the world cries out to him : Make her your mistress ; what is one sentimental episode in the career of a public man ? Scarcely an incident. We have a large indulgence for such incidents, and even smile at them where there is no scandal. . . . But it is precisely this complacency towards evil which is repugnant to Michel Tessier. It is for this reason, and because he is an honest man, that he is driven to comport himself after the fashion of a villain and a fool. He obtains a divorce from his wife, thus condemning her to despair, and his children to desertion ; he renounces his political and social position ; he brings serious injury upon causes of which he is the defender ; he sacrifices the interests of many to the satisfaction of his own desires. His act is one of those that echo far and wide, and whose consequences are indefinitely prolonged. The day will inevitably come when, this desperate love having cooled, he will be left to count up the many irreparable losses brought about by his passion — that passion whose very essence is not to endure.

Must we therefore say that love is in itself one of the powers of perdition ? Is the strongest instinct nature has implanted in us the one whose suggestions we must repress with the greatest violence ? Must we congratulate ourselves that social customs and prejudices have erected such strong barriers around it ? May we not conceive, on the

contrary, of cases, in which love, by raising us above ourselves, might be our most powerful aid in realizing the highest ends of our nature? The author of "Silence" tells the story of two beings who loved each other purely and silently. The world knew nothing of their love, curiosity spared them, suspicion never touched them. They themselves rather divined their mutual feeling than gave it expression. This love which they carried within them, hidden from all eyes, was an altar whereon they laid, with the sacrifice of all fruition, the almost divine offering of their visionary hopes and ideal reveries. "Alas," concludes the author, "in these delicate relations of the heart, who can trace the precise limits between good and evil? Who can say when the love forbidden by human laws is forbidden also by those higher laws, whose divine indulgence we can, at times, forecast? Who shall pronounce at what stage a sin is expiated by suffering or even transmuted thereby in its very essence? This is the final word of this analysis of passion, such as is developed in chosen hearts. Its supreme effort is one of self-renunciation, through which the soul, refined by suffering, may reach depths of feeling where few can follow, and rise, in a mystical ascent to the ideal perfection." We need not call attention to what is noble and generous in this conception of love as portrayed in M. Rod's books. He does not at-

tempt to disguise the difficulties of the struggle; but he shows that such a struggle is possible, and what its reward may be. This constitutes the moral value of his writings. His are good books: what is lacking to make them altogether admirable books? Perhaps only certain qualities of execution. We carry away from their perusal a distinct impression of the moral problems there set forth; the image of the characters, by whom these problems are worked out, is less clear. The analysis of the sentiments might also be clearer, its expression choicer and more rare. This is the direction in which M. Rod needs further development. We do not, indeed, ask of him that finish attained by the writers who are devoted to form before all; we do not demand from him their chiselled phrases nor the magic of their plastic style.

But what he ought to give us is greater conciseness of form, more precision in his delicacy, more force in his sobriety. Attention to style is beginning to be lost among the young writers of the day; and for those whose thought is commonplace, it matters little how they express it. But M. Rod has much to say to us, and things that are well worth saying. For him, therefore, it would be inexcusable not to heighten, by the expression, thoughts that in themselves are strong and courageous, and deserve to make their way among men.



M. J. H. ROSNY.



M. J. H. ROSNY.

LET us transport ourselves in fancy a few years into the future. . . . The tendencies that are now beginning to assert themselves in education have definitely triumphed. Polite letters are banished from the course of instruction. The study of the dead languages has been abandoned by a society that has no time to lose. Classic literature has been utterly repudiated by the very men whose mission it was to initiate youth into its beauties. The university has realized its ambition of being *modern*. It has been reformed in accordance with the views of those profound thinkers who rule our municipal affairs. It marches with the times. The present has broken all those heavy fetters which bound it to the traditions of the past. In all that relates to art and literature, the rising generation has entered upon a world in which its eyes are no longer saddened by any vestiges of antiquity. Everything dates from yesterday.

Let us not fancy, however, that these are days of ignorance; on the contrary, the average man

has never been so learned. On leaving college he knows everything. The university examinations are more heavily weighted than at the period when we were already beginning to fear lest they should crack beneath their load. All the sciences are included in them, for there is no such thing as a useless science. Each year, therefore, the examinations grow in direct ratio with the new discoveries. The brain of every French citizen has become an encyclopædia; he is a complete repertory of scientific formulas, a storehouse of positive facts. Humanity has made a great forward move; she is entering, with all sails spread, upon an era of positivism and utilitarianism, in which science and democracy rule the day.

In a society thus reared upon its true foundations, shall we go on making books? It is to be feared we may, as perfection is an ideal for which poor humanity may strive, but which it will never attain. So literary vanity has still a great future before it. But what are the books we shall write in this period which is approaching so rapidly? Let us assume that we possess writers endowed with the finest talents, gifted with observation, blessed with imagination, laborious, conscientious in their use of the pen, haunted by noble dreams. Let us admit that they may even write novels, what will those novels be?

The question is not an idle one, and in order

to solve it we are not reduced to hypotheses. We have an easy means of answering it with tolerable precision. We need only consult the novels of M. J. H. Rosny. It is a little less than ten years since M. Rosny published his first book, "Nell Horn." Let us recall for a moment the varied movements of thought, the currents of emotion, all the myriad influences that have contributed to the literary atmosphere of the last ten years. At that date, naturalism was already on the decline. It was perishing through the very excess of its narrowness and vulgarity. A taste was reviving for problems of the soul, and it was by its complexity that the modern soul attracted, while it perplexed, the most subtle analysts. These analysts were scrutinizing, with a mixture of hardihood and refinement, the eternally baffling problem of love. A wind of sadness, blowing from every quarter of the real world and of the world of dreams, had withered men's hearts. They were without impulse to action, having lost the support of faith. In despair at believing nothing, men tried to understand everything; they sought pastime in the play of their own ideas, and in the infinitely varying spectacle of their own contradictions. But scepticism and dilettantism are only phases of weariness, and equally transitory.

The spirit of our time, having refreshed itself by a return to the gospel narrative, became infused

once more with tenderness, charity, and pity. M. Rosny has remained outside of all these influences; they have been for him as if they were not, and have left no trace on his work. He is as far removed from the psychologists as from the dilettantes, from the neo-Christians as from the æsthetes. All that preoccupies the minds of our men of letters, all that charms them, all that tortures their souls, is for him non-existent. The atmosphere that he breathes is not ours. Nature and education alike have made him impenetrable, as it were, to the droppings of our sensibility. Inversely, when we take up his books, we have the sensation, the dizziness I may almost call it, of a journey into the unknown. The types we encounter, the questions we hear, the fashions of thought, the language, all disconcert us; we have a very acute and even painful impression of the distance that may separate men of the same period. We may have reached the same moment of intellectual development, we may live in the same city, and yet be so far apart!

M. Rosny, although he has already written much, is little known; and his books, full as they are of talent, have few readers. Some of the most fervent admirers of his work regard this indifference as the greatest injustice of modern times, and reproach us for our frivolity.

It is only just to recognize, however, that

M. Rosny has done nothing to conciliate an easy popularity. He has not stooped to any of those arts by which certain authors of the day insure the sale of their books. And since probity has become a virtue that we must salute when we encounter it in the world of letters, we compliment M. Rosny on his probity. In the same spirit he has disdained to take advantage of the latest refinement in the art of advertising. He does not *relate himself* in the newspapers. He does not regale the public with indiscretions as to his personality. We barely know that this personality is a double one. J. H. Rosny is a single author in two persons; his books are the product of the "collaboration" of two brothers, who have reached such a degree of intellectual sympathy that, a subject being chosen and the ideas settled on, they can set to work, each in turn, writing the same page. Beside such a fraternity as this, that of the Goncourts was, as we perceive, a mere fraternity of "*frères ennemis*." Such reserve is too much to be respected for us to seek to penetrate the sort of mystery in which M. Rosny wraps himself. I shall therefore content myself with looking into his books for what they may reveal of his intellectual development.

What strikes us at once is that the author of these books has, I will not say a scientific mind, but a taste for science. Almost all the characters

that he brings on the scene are, if not actual scientists, at least half or quarter scientists. One man is a physicist, one woman a student of medicine; other characters are vaguely chemists. They are all writers, one having penned a formidable treatise on "The Elimination of the Norseman Type from the Aryan Family," another "A History of Modern Migrations." If they are not all dreaming of some work on the "Metaphysics of Animals," it is because they are already absorbed in a project for "Reformed Legislation."

Each, according to his aptitudes or his tastes, has attempted to appropriate some scraps of universal knowledge. One among them, better endowed or with more audacity than the rest, tries to assimilate at once the whole sum of human knowledge. This is the young telegrapher, Marc Fane. He has acquired only a professional education, when he conceives the modest project of making the human race happy. Persuaded that everything holds together in the history of ideas, and that to lead humanity a step in its upward progress it is necessary to know *all* the needs of the modern world, he undertakes to complete his studies. He accordingly lays out a programme for himself, beside which that of Pico della Mirandola was mere child's play. All the sciences are represented, and each has its ration of time allowed it. "The ration of certain branches amounted to only five

minutes a week. Such were drawing, astronomy, and music. Gradually the scale rose until it reached ten hours of politics and twenty hours of sociology."

Naturally, the sciences that especially attracted Marc Fane were the most incomplete; those which have least of the certainty and most of the apparatus of science. He thus acquires all the elements of learning pell-mell, without order, without guide, without criticism, hurriedly and doggedly at the same time. He constructs for himself a system in which method is superseded by good-will.

After a while he reaches a state of mind which it is not without interest to note: —

"On certain days he instinctively took to chewing a little rubber ball, while an order of thoughts relating to electricity connected themselves in his mind with the mastication of this ball. He was, in fact, much occupied with electricity, closely allied as it is to life, to the human flesh, to the struggle between the organic and the inorganic, and leading finally to the abyss of ontology. . . . The telegrapher had a profound inquisitiveness in regard to his own person, an intense desire to classify himself, not only as a power, but as a physical form with its personal idiosyncrasies. At first he satisfied this curiosity by studying his physical structure in detail, the cubic measurement of the cranium, chiromancy, and the like, thirsting

to find analogies between himself and such and such a great man. Does his facial angle equal Cuvier's? the weight of his brain Cromwell's?"

Such are the direful results of over-study!

I am careful not to confound M. Rosny with his personages, or to believe that he is building up their biography out of fragments of his own. I remark merely that all the sciences inscribed on Marc Fane's programme of studies have left some trace in the novels of M. Rosny. Astronomy, for instance, occupies a great place. Constellations, planets, stars, are called familiarly by name. Is a lover dreaming of the caprices of his beloved? He does not forget to inform us that Rigel and Procyon are gliding across the firmament, that the Virgin is near Berenice's Hair, and the Arctic Circles are revolving around the axis of the earth.

Geology, palæontology, anthropology, ethnology, zoölogy, and a few annexed sciences supply the repertory of M. Rosny's figures of speech. These figures are so unexpected to us, and yet flow so spontaneously from the writer's pen, that we are enlightened thereby as to his habitual preoccupation.

Does he wish to describe to us the chamber where a man on his death-bed is recalling his past meditations, this chamber gives him the impression of being "coeval with the origin of the race, sister to those caves in which are found the

skeletons of prehistoric animals, as here the skeletons of his meditations."

Does he chance to meet a bone-setter, in the course of his walks about the fields, a sudden association of ideas evokes before him "long-past ages, the geological chaos in which the plesiosaurus and the iguanodon wandered about amidst stone arrow-heads and cave-dwellers."

So familiar is M. Rosny with prehistoric times that he makes himself a contemporary of the cave-dwellers without the slightest effort. While our timid glances confine themselves to a corner of society, or a corner of the soul, he is circulating with ease in a past of twenty thousand years ago, or in a future that has no limits. Taking but a feeble interest in the individual, he is passionately attracted by questions of race and species. If he depicts a husband gazing upon a beloved wife in her sleep how does he fancy him occupied? In taking measurements of her skull!

Physiology, with its most recent theories, is brought under-contribution. Here is a little discourse addressed by a dying man to his own body: —

"Already your cells are taken by assault, already the victorious microbes are swarming, already all is turned over to the profit of infinite myriads. The mortgage is taken; every drop of blood pays its tribute to the victorious atoms."

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Persons who have the taste rather than the habits of science have a tendency to take its formulas for explanations, and delight themselves in the mysteries of its terminology. As, for instance, the law of "reaction equal to action," the right of "self because it is self," the philosophy of error, the doctrine of probabilities, the rule of the minimum of chance. They rejoice in noting certain remote analogies that escape the sight of the ignorant. For most of us a piece of bread is a piece of bread. Look at it more closely and you will perceive, "straits, little egg-shaped hollows, irregular chasms, a tunnel, a cavern with ivory dome, whence hang capillary stalactites. It is the building up of a world, a system of cavities caused by the expansion of interior gases when the dough was still soft, an origin, in short, analogous to that of our terrestrial crust."

How many things in a mouthful of bread! There are no fewer in a cup of coffee. "Bent over his cup, he examined the gyration of globules, their collection in nebulous masses, and the accelerating speed of the aerolites rushing toward their centre."

This is the triumph of the object-lesson! From the same point of view M. Rosny looks at social questions, — natural rights, the division of labor, the re-division of wealth, the laws of inheritance, Malthusianism, population, depopulation, and repopulation. Science presents to him even the

question of the Seventh Commandment under an aspect which, for not being the aspect of sentiment and passions whereto ordinary romance-writers confine themselves, has all the more chance of being the true one. That which we call guilty love, or simply love, is, in short, only "the indomitable instinct that demands a renewal of selection." Starting from this principle, a husband about to be false to his wife puts the case of his innocence or guilt thus: —

"Where is the crime in seeking what nature so eagerly desires, in obeying this instinct of irresistible, magnificent, and prolific polygamy?"

This may sound displeasing to our ears, but it is because we have neither the taste nor the habit of truth. This worship of science is essential and fundamental with M. Rosny. To this all his theories are subordinated; through it he approaches literature, and from it his whole system of æsthetics proceeds. What he proposes, in fact, is to find "in the wide domain of human progress, amid the acquisitions of science and philosophy, more complex elements of beauty than the past affords, more adapted to our advanced civilization!"

He believes that the great discoveries of the end of the century are in the highest degree susceptible of being transmuted into literary material. To evolve from the scientific achievements of this era the elements of literature which it contains,

such is the task he has assigned himself, and to this he tries to subject the novel.

His moral theories, like his literary ones are based on science. This solid basis is what is wanting, he thinks, to Christian morality; therefore, we must turn away resolutely from an ideal that has had its day. We must no longer make virtue reside in humility. The new ideal should proceed from a more complex conception of life and evolution. The gospel idea should be replaced by a more rational form of altruism. In this comprehensive morality the supreme good should be a means of more fully developing a race of superior beings. Ideas of intelligence, of strength, of conflict, must all enter into the idea of goodness. To the abstract conception of absolute good succeeds the idea of an organic, experimental good in course of evolution. Such is the "morality of species," which contemporary philosophy is trying to create. This morality, independent of dogmas, cultivated outside of churches, has, nevertheless, its own sacred enthusiasm. This new Goodness, with her mysticism, her beautiful and subtle means of grace, her rewards, her superior harmony, will tempt the "powerful minds of our epoch and subdue the commonplace ones. Imperious she may be, but not through priestly terrors, nor through the nihilism of the down-trodden. She will not preach the destruction of the good

for the profit of the bad; she will be stoical for the lofty joy of stoicism, modest for the lowly power of modesty, but always active, dominant, happy" . . . owing no duty to any religion, she shall be a religion unto herself; but, instead of locating her heaven in some far-away, super-terrestrial region, beyond this life, she will place it here below, in the progressive amelioration of life. For the worship of God she will substitute the worship of Humanity.

There is a great deal of farrago in all this; but it is not for me to let daylight in upon this obscurity, and I have the less occasion to dispute these theories, since they are not the exclusive possession of M. Rosny. He has gleaned them in the course of his reading. Besides, in matters of art, theories are of no consequence except for the work that is built on them; and doctrines take on different shades of meaning according to the differing minds through which they pass. Even science lends herself to the most opposite interpretations. According to the tendencies of our nature, or the inclination of our minds, we draw from her a lesson of pride or of humility, a counsel of optimism or a verdict of despair, and our imagination can draw from her either the most arid theme or one of dazzling splendor.

Thus from the dry doctrines of Epicurus, Lucretius could weave a poem glowing with enthusiasm,

wrath, and pity. Whatever be the means that an author employs in his work, what we look for is the sentiment he has poured into it, and the light of his own he has thrown on the shifting scenes of life.

To paint contemporary manners in their environment, to set before the eyes of the reader a picture copied as closely as possible from reality, this is what M. Rosny has undertaken to do, not without success, in his first series of novels.

"Nell Horn" is a story of London life. The adventures of the heroine, Nelly, the daughter of the detective Horn, serve chiefly as a pretext for a set of sketches of the London populace. We are introduced to meetings of the Salvation Army, where we listen to eloquent preaching, and catch glimpses of a dark background. We are shown into the noisy dwelling of the Horns, where an uproar prevails, made up of the brutalities of the drunken father, the hysterical ravings of the mother, the sobs of Nelly, and the frightened outcries of the children. Then follows a long sojourn in a hospital, with its nights of agonized struggle with death, the cure, the slow convalescence. Then come episodes of studio-life, street-life, home-life, and finally the descent through the lowest circles of English poverty and misery. Amid these scenes, move pale forms, passive waifs, floating at the mercy of every current of circumstance.

Between Justus and Nelly a drama of desertion is enacted, almost in spite of themselves, and through a sort of fatality. Justus has promised himself that he will not make Nelly his mistress, that he will not incur the responsibility or the remorse of such an act; consequently he does become Nelly's lover, and when she is the mother of his child, he abandons her and the infant, as men have abandoned women before, not through deliberate perversity, but with death in his heart. Nelly had dreamed of fidelity to one only love. She is by nature virtuous, brave, and industrious; she would willingly live in poverty in order to remain worthy of esteem. But from all sides there come to her the same evil counsels, dissolving her energy, stifling her scruples, and breaking down her power of resistance. To be pretty, and made for love, and yet to intrench oneself behind a sullen austerity, of which she is herself the chief victim, is to play the part of a dupe, they tell her. In vain she stops her ears; she *must* end by listening to the tempter's voice. These melancholy things are told with a sort of restrained emotion and veiled sadness. A little of the tenderness of the author of "Jacks" has touched the disciple of M. Zola.

In the "Bilateral" we turn from London to Paris, — the Paris of the Faubourgs and the eccentric quarters, of the outer boulevards from the

Lion of Belfort to the Salle Griffard, and from Montrouge to Montmartre. The world into which we are introduced is that populous quarter which is forever haunted by the longing for a great social overturn. The Utopia-makers, the dreamers of universal and immediate felicity, the prophets of Edens for everybody, the inventors of panaceas and explosives, the partisans of a general propaganda by word and act; those who counsel calmness and those who preach an immediate revolt, revolutionists and evolutionists, politicians of the extreme left, socialists, anarchists, grumblers, haters, fanatics, — all these file before us an obscure and menacing throng. Theories hurtle through the dusky precincts of the back-shop, and hang like smoke-clouds in the murky atmosphere of the popular club.

The author has a gift for handling the masses; and he groups these masses before us in some vivid and animated scenes. He shows them to us as they are, — violent, terrible, whether engaged in executing a traitorous comrade, or in holding the police at bay in a riot at Père Lachaise. Whether reformers or mere rioters, what characterizes all these poor reasoners is their total incapacity for seeing more than one side of a question.

The personage whom they call the "Bilateral" can see both sides; hence his surname! and it is

this quality which makes him an object of suspicion to his mates.

The same atmosphere prevails in "Marc Fane," with a repetition of the same scenes and the same discussions; but whereas, in the former novel, the interest was dispersed among a crowd of supernumeraries, here it is concentrated on a few leading figures. It unveils to us the rivalry of two party-leaders. We are present at the *début* of the orator of the Practical party, are made witnesses of his studies, his trials, his alternatives of success and failure. We listen to a record of the dreams, the hopes, the errors, of Marc Fane. Marc believed that "revolutionary collectivism would withdraw into the background at the not distant hour when Homogeneity of material interests, under the State, would oppose no obstacle to that Heterogeneity of individuals, that originality, so indispensable to a high civilization." He believed all this, Marc Fane! It is evident therefore that he must have understood it.

All these books are those of a good disciple of the naturalist school. The same may be said of "Immolation," a study of peasant life, that reminds us of the most brutal of Maupassant's short stories.

"Termite" is a study of literary society, the most downright detestable, to my mind, of the author's books; at once pretentious and heavy;

laden with theories which the characters are powerless to put into action; leading us, through a maze of furious discussions, to this somewhat flat conclusion: "We are all small fry — very small fry indeed."

"Vamireh, a pre-historic novel," in spite of its title and sub-title, is merely a novel composed according to the formulas of the "human document" school. There is the same rage for description, the same propensity for dragging into the story notes culled from scientific manuals and the works of specialists. It matters little that the scene is laid some twenty thousand years ago, amid the Dolicephalous races of Europe and the Brachycephalous races of Asia, with an escort of sloths and ant-eaters. It is only another kind of dough, poured into the same "waffle-irons." The discipline of naturalism has weighed heavily upon M. Rosny. It was imposed on him of necessity, from the start; for, destitute as he was of an adequate literary culture, and his horizon therefore bounded by contemporary productions, he was forced to write according to the methods which he saw employed around him, not suspecting, in fact, the existence of any others. For the same reason, he had great difficulty in disengaging himself from this school; and, despite a signal rupture, he has never regained complete freedom. Even in his latest books we find the same fashion of

introducing his characters, the same descriptions, the same tendency to "*faire le morceau*."

The naturalist writers have remained his masters in the art of writing. Nevertheless, his last series of novels, "Daniel Valgraive," "L'Impérieuse Bonté,"¹ "L'Indomptée,"² "Le Renouveau,"³ "L'Autre Femme,"⁴ are of a somewhat different order. They are more within our grasp and that of mankind in general; they have a wider human interest and a more accessible form, and are altogether less repellent, or, as their author would say, less horror-striking. Though the execution still leaves much to be desired, we can at least discern through it the writer's moral ideal, which is not without grandeur and a certain austere poetry.

Daniel Valgraive suddenly learns that he is condemned by the physicians, and has not a year to live. Without vain self-pity, without faltering or weakness, he devotes the short space of time left him to accomplishing the greatest good within his power. He resolves to insure the happiness of those dearest to him, and to carry away the bitter consolation of feeling that they will be happy without him, almost in despite of him. He therefore brings together his wife and his best friend Hugues, in order that they may learn to

¹ J. H. Rosny, "L'Impérieuse Bonté" (Imperious Kindness).

² "L'Indomptée" (The Undaunted).

³ "Le Renouveau" (Spring-time).

⁴ "L'Autre Femme" (The Other Woman).

love each other, and that this new love may stifle and supersede the love his wife bears to him. Little by little, at the price of what tortures of jealous affection, he sees his plan succeeding! It remains for him to conquer the last revolt of his breaking heart, on the day when, perfect master of himself, without a tremor in his voice, he can resign in favor of another that which is dearer to him than life, saying: "I give to you, Hugues, my wife and my child, trusting you to be their safeguard in this world, and by your love to protect the one from its miseries and snares, and the other from the common fate of orphans."

This fervor of stoical virtue, this shadow of death brooding over the story, the firmness of design, the sobriety of detail, of which M. Rosny has, for once, shown himself capable, give to this book a place apart in his work. Elsewhere we can indeed divine the theories which M. Rosny has sought to express; namely, "that goodness should be made up of intelligence and energy; that virtue should never lose heart; that life reserves unlooked-for compensations for those who do not despair." These ideas are neither vulgar nor trite; the trouble is that we are reduced to divining them.

We touch here upon a serious flaw in M. Rosny's work, and one which it is impossible to pass over without condemnation; to wit, the complete

absence of all sense of form, — a sort of monstrosity of style. That form has a value of its own, that beauty is a “joy forever,” that art has within itself a reason for being, and has in its very essence something enduring, which triumphs over change and survives ruin, — this he does not even suspect.

“No subject,” he asserts, “no method, no language, can resist the ordeal of time. Châteaubriand, Balzac, Hugo, and we who are writing to-day, will all be Barbarians at some future day. We have not yet abdicated the pride of becoming the admiration of all the ages, of building indestructibly. It is this pride that leads us to repel the innovator. It is this which, under myriad forms, in the name of a host of sentiments, each more sacred than the other, is forever disinterring Homer, Racine, Shakespeare.”

Beyond doubt, the law of a perpetual revival does indeed reign in literature. But no one proposes to *recommence* Homer and Shakespeare. We only affirm that they will never cease to be admired as long as the human intellect has not abdicated.

This absence of the æsthetic sense makes itself cruelly apparent in the way M. Rosny constructs his novels. They are marvels of the rambling and irrelevant in plot; everything goes at haphazard. The subject, or one of the subjects, appears only to be instantly abandoned. We

barely begin to follow a trail before we recognize it as a false one. Episodes succeed one another in a happy-go-lucky fashion, without connecting link, without reason, without appreciable utility, and are dwelt upon in inverse ratio to their importance. There is neither order nor symmetry, choice nor taste. The emphasis is always laid where it is not needed; and everywhere there is a profusion of detail, a luxury of digression, and an accumulation of raw material.

These are novels that begin all over again at every page; so that one is in constant fear of their never ending, and the shortest of them seems interminable. And withal, there is a primitive awkwardness that is not, as in the case of some of our contemporaries, the refinement of artifice, but a genuine mixture of clumsiness and *naïveté*.

Whenever an author is accused of writing badly, he is sure to retort that he has the right to create his own language, and that new sensations demand a new mode of expression. The argument is too convenient for M. Rosny not to be the hundredth one to employ it: "To new orders of sensation correspond new varieties of form. Whether the terms we employ are those of science or architecture, physics or painting, what matters it? The same process has gone on through the ages, — enriching art with all that time produces, multiplying the elements of beauty by seeking them out

in all domains of human activity. Where is the vaunted French clearness of style? Is it found in Rabelais, so obscure, diffuse, and pedantic, so worshipped by all the pedants of to-day? In Racine, whose every phrase is a model of contortions and far-fetched images?"

For the sake of argument, let us admit M. Rosny's premises, and assume that we understand his development of them. Let us take Racine and Rabelais for geniuses of the same order, examples that may be evoked in support of the same line of reasoning. Let us furthermore concede to M. Rosny his scientific terms, and allow him to talk of entelechy and palingenesis, odynamy and osmose, since he experiences a visible satisfaction in the use of these vocables, and their syllables afford him keen delight. Let it be agreed that for his novels, and his alone, we shall always have the Universal Dictionary of Sciences within reach of our hand; it is the least we can do to take a little trouble to pay for our pleasures. Let us forgive him the use of such rare words as "*abstème, pertinace, coupetées.*" Let us even accept such fashions of speech as he has learnt from the Goncourts: "All the occult of the Nocturnities worked upon his soul, and made itself intimate with his sufferings" — "All these reasons, after appearing to class themselves, fled through his mentality" — "He extinguished the beacon-lights

of ratiocination." Let us refrain from asking what is meant by "documentary extravasation," and pretend that we feel a secret charm in the adjective "*Soiral*." Let us admire as we ought these extraordinary images, of which Racine himself would never have thought. "His Shoshone head, his eye of a scout, and autocratic lip had assumed at Faugeraye's words the calm of torrid ravines when autumn comes," — "They were penetrated with the darkness as with a parabola, at once stellar and microbial." Let us regard the following remark as a gem, and not a piece of nonsense: "When she rose from her chair, Grace rose with her." But *why* must we encounter among the neologisms of M. Rosny such words as "*ressurgissements*;" which, whatever he may say, does not exist, and for the simple reason that it cannot exist? Why does he employ words in an opposite sense to the true one, or use one for another, as for instance, "his adventure can be abridged," meaning "summed up"? Why do we see, blooming forth in his style, expressions which, by whatever pompous name he may choose to call them, are merely incorrect vulgarisms? M. Rosny writes off-hand: "*Ils dissolvèrent, ils poignèrent*." — We might just as well say, if the fancy took us: "*Je me cassis le bras*," or "*Je me prendrais la tête entre les mains*." Foreigners who speak "French as it is taught in 'Twenty-five Lessons'"

are sure to do so; only they do not pretend to be enriching the language — they are simply massacring it.

M. Rosny, who is so familiar with the sciences, knows better than we, that language is an organism, the laws of which we cannot violate with impunity. If, then, he violates these laws, it is because he is ignorant of them. This puts us on our guard, and disinclines us to indulgence for his many eccentricities, to which we might otherwise have resigned ourselves. Decidedly, if his style is incoherent, rugged, bristling with difficulties, these are not to be regarded as so many merits.

These defects doubtless arise, in part, from the quality of M. Rosny's mind; but they result also from his neglect to initiate himself into the traditions of our language. His writings remind us of the conversation of a man of slow and labored speech, whose thought, obscure in itself, is rendered still more so by his hesitating and constrained utterance. Confusion of thought thus becomes denser through incorrectness of expression. I hasten to state that these defects have become rarer in M. Rosny's latest books. As he attains, by degrees, to a clearer consciousness of his ideal, he finds, at the same time, more appropriate forms in which to clothe it.

I repeat — in case I may not have said it clearly enough before, and in order that there may be no

misunderstanding of my purpose in this study — that I hold his talent in high esteem. I do not pay him the poor compliment of comparing him with certain novelists who have a much larger audience, and whose success is the reward of their mediocrity and their adroitness. I insist upon his merits, — his sincerity and good faith, the enthusiasm of his convictions, the nobleness and richness of his ideas, his concern for morality, and a certain sturdy vigor and turbid power. His qualities are entirely his own, while, doubtless, the fashion of his intellectual training did not depend upon himself. It may be that he will succeed in freeing his thought from the shackles that impede it, and will yet write books which we can admire unreservedly.

But, even as it stands to-day, his work has its significance, its reason for being. It may be one of the brightest ornaments of that epoch we predicted above, when what was once a high intellectual culture has suffered shipwreck. Thus the poem of Abbon¹ rises like a fragment of rude art in a barbarous age.

It is for this reason that we have followed with a sympathetic curiosity the novels of M. Rosny. They reveal the future of fiction under a reign of enlightened Barbarism, when art and literature have been put to flight before an all-triumphant Sociology.

¹ Abbon, a French monk, author of a poem on the siege of Paris by the Northmen, written A.D. 885.



M. PAUL HERVIEU.





M. PAUL HERVIEU.

ELEGANT, with a somewhat English style of elegance, and with a studied correctness of manner which suggests the diplomat, — a finished talker, with a slow utterance and half-veiled tone of voice, few gestures, and a restless glance from eyes which are now dreamy and again cold and penetrating, after the fashion of some soft blue eyes, — such is M. Paul Hervieu; and those who see him for the first time after reading his writings are grateful to him for not differing too much from the image they had formed of him, and for being, on the whole, the man of his books. In Athens, the intellectual city *par excellence*, there once lived a philosopher whose ways of life had earned for him the nickname of “the Dog;” and this title had made him the fashion. His philosophy consisted in a wholesale contempt for humanity and hatred of civilized society. But this hatred, after all, was not devoid of affectation, and this cynicism was not without a dash of foppery. This is the history of “Diogenes the Dog,” which M. Hervieu took a fancy to relate to us upon his entrance into

the world of letters, ten years ago. He related it with a seriousness which testified to his respect for his hero, but without comment, or any of those attempts to point a moral by which the writers of lives of the saints so often seek to show their zeal. Thus he made his *début* in literature by a sort of quiet provocation of his contemporaries.

The chances of a summer tour having led him into Savoy and Switzerland, he was struck by the vindictive aspects of nature among those heights, and by the hostile air worn by those mountain masses; and he next wrote, in "Les Alpes Homicides," the story of some of the crimes committed by the mountains.

Edgar Allan Poe's writings were beginning at that time to exert an influence over our younger writers which few of them escaped. Under this influence our author turned his attention to that mysterious world which hallucination and madness people with agonizing phantoms. He took pleasure in tracing the association of ideas in the brains of madmen; and here minded us, not without secret satisfaction, how, in the opinion of specialists in brain diseases, the limit dividing the sane from the insane is imperceptible and well-nigh imaginary, so that one can never be sure of being on this or that side of the line. See, for instance, his "Les Yeux Verts et Les Yeux Bleus,"¹

¹ "Green Eyes and Blue Eyes."



PAUL HERVIEU.



“L’Inconnu,”¹ “L’Exorcisée.”² About this time the novel of high life came into favor once more, thanks to the rare talents of Paul Bourget. M. Hervieu has accordingly given us two sketches in this line, of which “Flirt” is in the lighter vein, and the later one, “Peints par Eux-mêmes,”³ is a highly successful example of “cruel literature.”

Beneath these superficial influences, the personality of the writer defines itself clearly, and I know few among our new writers whose traits of originality are more marked.

In the first place, M. Hervieu is a misanthrope; and, indeed, I incline to believe that this is his chief trait. Humanity seems to him to merit only a great disdain. We talk of virtue, and we are right—it is only fools who say that virtue does not exist; but besides the fact that we rarely encounter it, we see that it is lightly prized among men, and holds but a poor estate in the world.

M. Hervieu sees chiefly the tragic side of life, — those domestic tragedies, so much more frequent than we like to admit; tragedies which meet us at every turn, in which we play our parts of hero or victim, but from which our eyes turn away involuntarily, while we seek to forget that such things exist, partly from recklessness, but also

¹ “The Unknown.”

² “The Exorcised.”

³ “Painted by Themselves.”

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because too much reflection on the motives we have for hating life would spoil our taste for living. Hence comes to our author the turn for irony which is habitual with him.

That there is, in fact, much evil in the world, and more evil than good, we all admit; and this being so, some will pity, others will mock mankind, each according to his bent. It is only a question of the stuff of which nature has made us. M. Hervieu is neither pitiful nor tender; and being exceedingly clear-sighted, and gifted with rare powers of observation, his knowledge of men furnishes him with ever-new reasons for despising them.

Another characteristic of his mind, and not the least essential, is its distinction. The term a "writer of distinction" has been so much abused as not only to have lost its original significance, but positively to have reversed its meaning. To bestow it upon a writer now, is to admit that we have renounced all hope of finding out *how* he distinguishes himself from others. But restore the word to its true meaning, and M. Paul Hervieu corresponds absolutely with the definition. A writer of distinction has, first of all, a horror of the commonplace in ideas or expression. This disdain of the common leads him to the pursuit of the rare, which is sometimes exquisite and sometimes 'bizarre. Never coarse, he knows how to

imply what may not be said; never brutal, his very violence will be but a touch. None of that over-emphasis which is a sign of defective education and bad taste. Nothing which suggests the pedant; nothing, either, which betrays the personal feelings of the writer, who always avoids bringing himself upon the scene. He never shows indignation, for that is *bourgeois*; he never declaims, for that is plebeian. He abstains from all outbursts, whether peals of laughter or explosions of anger; he never lets himself go, or loses complete self-possession and mastery of himself. "The gentleman is he who plumes himself upon nothing,"¹ was said by one whose right it was to say it. Such is likewise the sign by which we recognize in a writer the gentlemanlike quality of mind, to which he also must be born. It is in the sense I have thus indicated that M. Paul Hervieu is a writer of distinction. These tendencies of the author's mind are to be seen in his precise and finished style, very penetrating in its dry, fine-spun fashion. We shall see how this combination has enabled him to show us society life under an aspect which is quite his own.

We know how rare with us are pictures of the fashionable world, apart, at least, from those drawn for us by the writers of serial fiction. The society people of M. Hervieu have the bearing,

¹ "L'honnête homme est celui qui ne se pique de rien."

the speech, the manner of feeling and acting, of society people. This fashionable world is not quite that which was painted by the heraldic Octave Feuillet; for life, even society life, has retired from the defunct faubourg. Fashion now dwells in the modern quarter. But as its first concern is to model itself upon the fine manners and sentiments of the titled, it comes to the same thing, or nearly so. . . .

That which the writer likes in the spectacle of fashionable life is that he finds there the supreme effort of civilization, the last touch of refinement and complexity in the human being. It is an intensely artificial, even paradoxical state, in which men share in common only what is noblest and most delicate in themselves. But all the while, this cultivation has not modified their essential being.

Behind the scaffolding of good manners, as behind the edifice of good morals, stands the natural man, whom his instincts sweep along to the immediate and brutal gratification of his own wishes. Human ugliness hides itself under the pleasing adornment of society. Tragedies lurk beneath that smooth surface. We are apt to picture evil with the classic accompaniments of anguish, tortures, and remorse. We personify crime in the ruffians of the police court or the traitors of the *Boulevard du Crime*. But all the

tragedies of life do not find their *dénouement* before a tribunal, nor do they all reach what we mistakenly call the *broad daylight* of the courts. There are silent dramas, whose actors are noble and exquisite beings, where the victims do not complain, the witnesses do not speak; in which treachery, suicide, and murder respect the proprieties. This is the "tragedy" of society.

This contrast between the polished surface and the troubled depths is what M. Hervieu knows so well how to reproduce, thanks to the quality of his talent, which is at once bitter and refined. Among well-bred people all is politeness, deference, respect. But this respect lies; this ease of manner is assumed; this calmness is only apparent. Let but the slightest rift be made in this veil so cunningly wrought, and what ugly things do we behold? We give a momentary shudder, as quickly suppressed. We have seen nothing, our lips are still smiling. . . . So it is, and so it must continue to be. For when the day comes that men renounce social hypocrisies, all will be over with society. And yet society must go on.



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M. J. K. HUYSMANS,

OR,

“THE DECADENTS OF CHRISTIANITY.”



M. J. K. HUYSMANS,
OR,
"THE DECADENTS OF CHRISTIANITY."

A WIND of conversion is blowing over literature, and floods of grace have descended upon the writers of this latter day. Those have been especially touched by it whom we should least expect to see entering the fold of the church. The stage was sanctified first; and we have lately seen before the footlights so many abbés and nuns, and such a throng of devout personages, we have listened to so much ringing of bells and reciting of prayers on the stage, that it is evident the old anathemas have lost all their meaning.

And in order that the reconciliation between church and stage should be the more impressive, a writer of plays has been chosen as bearer of the glad tidings. One of the joyous authors of "Durand et Durand" has been raised up to reveal to us the philosophy of the twentieth century.¹ And this is the spectacle on which M.

¹ Albin Valabrègue, "La Philosophie du XX^{me} Siècle."

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Albin Valabrègue invites us to gaze, not without first calling our attention to its importance: —

“This century, which has beheld a priest, a man of genius and its greatest writer, give up the gospel and cry, ‘Jesus is not the Son of God!’ this same century beholds a Jew, an unlearned man and a playwright, return toward the same gospel, crying, ‘Jesus is the Son of God!’”

This is doubtless due to Renan’s having been denied the strong preparation of the stage. He has never perceived that “the gospel is in three acts,” and that “the nineteenth century is the *entr’acte*.”

M. Valabrègue, while reading the Sermon on the Mount, has felt his soul “carried away, as it were, on a torrent of flame.” That is why, borrowing the tone of the great seers, he proclaims the new gospel, which is, after all, only the old one slightly retouched. All of which is not wanting in piquancy.

In the meantime the novel could not be left behind. Already, under the influence of the Russian writers, fiction had begun to amend its ways. It had welcomed Christian ideas, and applied the merits of the gospel to episodes involving a breach of the seventh commandment. There was better still to come. In our day, when so many things have been introduced into fiction, from history and erudition to philosophy and

political economy, why could not the lives of the saints be so utilized? What story could be more attractive than that of a soul receiving the first touches of the divine? What more moving drama than that of the sinner wrestling with the evil spirit? The novel of divine grace had never yet been written. This task appealed to the author of "En Ménage" and "Les Sœurs Vatard."

For some time the friends of M. Huysmans had not been free from anxiety about him. They were startled by the eccentricity of his habits. He had taken to frequenting churches; he wandered from St. Sulpice to St. Séverin, and from the fashionable services of the Madeleine to the most select of private chapels. He mingled with the poor before dawn at their early masses; and he was kneeling before the altars at evening, when the last lights have been extinguished, and the "fretted vaults" abandoned to darkness. He assisted at the ceremony of taking the veil, and, like Jean Racine, tasted the pleasure of tears.

It was even reported that he had shut himself up in a Trappist monastery. Was he about to assume the frock? A rumor to that effect circulated, and already the reporters were lamenting that he was lost to literature.

Nothing of the kind. All these devotional practices were to redound to the greater glory of lite-

ature. M. Huysmans was providing himself with *documents*. It is not for nothing that a writer passes through the naturalist school; for though he may have noisily repudiated certain of its doctrines, he clings to its sane methods of work. Just as M. Zola takes pains to visit the spots he intends to describe, and to inform himself by reading hand-books about them, M. Huysmans, after the same fashion, was studying the clerical world, learning to distinguish between the regular and secular clergy, comparing the relative merits of different places of worship, and skimming ecclesiastical works.

The result of this laborious inquest was his new novel "En Route."¹ This very curious and very remarkable book is a work of edification. It is addressed to all who are weary of a worldly life, and desire to betake themselves to the shadow of sacred walls to work out the salvation of their souls, and taste the peace of the cloister. He smooths the way for them, and removes their first reluctance and hesitation. Incidentally he deals with materialists, positivists, and Voltaireans according to their deserts. In several passages he refutes such of their objections as are the more formidable from their absurdity. For instance, they feign to consider mysticism as a form of hysteria, whereas precisely one of the distinguishing

¹ J. K. Huysmans "En Route," 1 vol.

signs of mysticism is its absolute equilibrium and perfect common sense. Similarly it is only error and malice which assume that the mystic has a pointed skull. M. Huysmans declares, on the strength of repeated experiments, that their skulls are sometimes quite flat. Elsewhere he invokes, in support of the truths of religion, proofs such as we should hardly have thought of; as, for instance, establishing the doctrine of the real presence by the phenomena of spiritualism.

It was thus that M. Valabrègue discovered in the use of the bicycle an argument in favor of the church. There is nothing like having one's mind directed towards a learned interpretation of dogma.

The great service which M. Huysmans renders to his readers is to bring within their reach authors generally little known to the frivolous public. He has drawn up a catalogue for their benefit of all the writers who have expounded the principles and theories of mysticism, such as Saint Denis the Areopagite, Saint Bonaventura, Hugh and Richard of Saint Victor, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Bernard, Angelo of Foligno, the two Eckarts, Tauler, Saint Hildegarde, Saint Catherine of Genoa, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Gertrude, and Saint Matilda. I pass over a host of others. He has studied especially the admirable Ruysbroeck, whom Hello translated, and whom Maeter-

linck has recently obscured. Here are works which are little in demand at Flammarion's, and with which the circulating libraries are poorly provided. M. Huysmans has assimilated them all. Thanks to him, the Cenobites and the seers have emerged from their ancient cloisters and musty folios, and taken up their abode in the unworthy souls of us journalists, clubmen, and frequenters of salons. What deters us ordinarily from the perusal of books of piety is their style. Lives of the saints, sacred histories, treatises on dogma, are all written in the same vapid and monotonous style; and their insipidity is apt to repel us. There hangs about them a sickly odor of sacristies, and the breath of the nineteenth century does not blow through them. They are sadly wanting in relief and color, and lack the *imprévu* and a touch of gayety.

With M. Huysmans there is no such drawback to our enjoyment. His book is in glaring contrast to the literature we find in the libraries of the Rue St. Sulpice. He talks fluently of the "chloral of prayer," of the "sublimate of the sacraments," of the "turnspit of the rosary." He speaks of sermons as "broth made from the fatted calf," of the "vaseline of sacred eloquence," and calls the secular clergy the "scum of the seminaries." The music performed in our churches has the special gift of rousing M. Huysmans' verve and fury. To show us its profane character, he

has found lucky hits of expression, whose drollery is quite matchless, like this: "After the *Kyrie Eleison* and the opening invocation, the Virgin entered upon the scene like a ballerina, to a strain of dance music." . . . "Around a wheezy harmonium, a troop of young and old geese were prancing through the litany as they might ride a wooden horse to the music of a country fair." . . .

Dartal, the hero of "En Route," is far from having the contrite mien, the downcast eyes, and the devout tone of voice we associate with a seminarian. While walking in a procession, with a dripping candle in his hand, he remarks to himself: "How like a rind of lard I must look!"

He addresses surprising reproaches to the clergy, as, for example, on closing the churches too early, and "putting the Infant Jesus to bed at sundown." He relieves the monotony of his examinations of conscience by lively ejaculations of, "Well, I am amazing, all the same!" The fashion in which he discusses with himself the stock arguments of scepticism has nothing of the pedant about it: "Your liberty of man, a pretty business! and what do you say of atavism and early associations, and diseases of the brain and the spinal marrow? Can a man moved by diseased impulses be held responsible for his acts? Well, who says that those acts are imputed to us *up above*? What idiocy after all!" Such is his tone: unction enlivened by

banter; abstract philosophy illustrated with the fancy of an artist and the chaff of a gamin. He translates the liturgy into a dialect of his own, made up of the trivialities of the latest slang and the refinements of impressionist literature. This produces a very prolonged and heightened comic effect. It is amusing and exciting at the same time, and tells upon the nerves.

I have tried to indicate what is the artistic value of M. Huysmans' novel: it is great. It is not, however, from that point of view that we should consider it, in order to perceive its veritable importance. "En Route" is above all a document. It instructs us as to the state of a certain class of modern souls. Is Durtal intended for M. Huysmans himself? It is possible, but that matters little. What gives great value to M. Huysmans' books is that, in studying himself, he has discovered some of the traits — and the most disquieting ones — of contemporary sensibility. The taste which he has naturally for all that is artificial and *high* in flavor has inspired him with the type of "Des Esseintes," in which several *fin de siècle* gentlemen have recognized themselves, and upon which several others have at once proceeded to model themselves. He published "Là-Bas" at the moment when the fashion was reviving for magic, satan-worship, and all those other bizarre forms of devotion which M. Jules Bois has inven-

toried in his book, "The Little Religions of Paris." Therefore we behold Durtal passing from black to white mysticism just in time to hear his testimony in the name of a whole group of literary Christians. He protests his sincerity — the genuineness of his faith; and even if he did not, we should abstain, merely out of courtesy, from casting a doubt upon anybody's sincerity. We feel that in studying the state of Durtal's soul, and seeking to discover the motives that determined his conversion, we are learning, at the same time, the worth of that Christianity whose worship is celebrated in certain private chapels recently consecrated; and we are discovering what elements combine to produce that mysticism which is the newest fashion and latest fad in literature. Durtal is a literary man of over forty, one of whose characteristics is the horror with which the modern world inspires him. Our ways of life, our ideas, our art, — or what passes for such, — our politics, are all repugnant to him. Being an author whose first training was in the naturalistic school, and who was thus early accustomed to see the real only in its ugliness and turpitude, he takes in, with a morbid acuteness of sensation, the nauseous side of life; he walks about with lips puckered and nostrils contracted, like a man pursued by a bad smell.

He does not except himself in his universal contempt for mankind, and his misanthropy begins

with number one. In short, he is a personage disgusted with everything. He finds it impossible to escape the contagion of commonplace which has invaded all things, and has even impaired the ceremonial of the church. Durtal, in quest of presentable services and a mass celebrated with propriety, reminds us of M. Folantin in the play, in pursuit of a fairly eatable beefsteak and a not utterly repugnant cook-shop.

In truth, the hour has struck for the reign of the *Cad!* (*le mufle*). That is why Durtal dreams of that "dolorous and exquisite period," the Middle Ages. Then life was worth living — a life of clashings and contrasts, mad and sublime. Then a human personality could develop itself, and show forth in the highest relief. There was art, too, in those days: "In sculpture and painting there were the primitives, in poetry and prose the mystics, in music the plain song flourished, and in architecture the Romanesque and the Gothic — and all this held together."

Durtal has the keenest artistic sense. The pages in which he studies the correspondence between the arts in the Middle Ages are among the most remarkable in his book; and this medieval art was inspired by Christianity. Is not this a sufficient proof of the moral beneficence and theological truth of Catholicism?

"Ah! the real evidence of the truth of Catholi-

cism is in that art which it founded — that art which has never been surpassed." This is the argument of Châteaubriand; it will always remain the most convincing one for artists and men-of-letters.

Among Durtal's reasons for returning to Catholicism, there is yet another, which he does not avow, and which has therefore a chance of being the true one. It is a delicate chapter, but one upon which the author gives us such precise and abundant details that we have no scruple in approaching it. The sensuous element contained in Catholicism has often been dwelt upon. It pervades, in the first place, the ceremonies of its worship and its external pomps. The mysterious twilight of the churches, the dull glitter of the ornaments on the altar, the odor of incense and melting tapers, the perfume of flowers, the mystery of low murmured words, the harmony of voices and instruments, are so many caresses, appealing to all the senses at once, and steeping them in a delicious languor.

Religion adds also an intellectual stimulus to the pleasures of the senses.

Trespasses that are in themselves indifferent to us, become interesting when we reflect that they are trespasses. It is like the *mot* of the Neapolitan woman sipping her sherbet and exclaiming, "How much better it would taste if drinking it were a sin!" On the same principle, many people are

grateful to Christianity for increasing their power of enjoyment by inventing the notion of sin. Durtal is that sort of a Christian!

Let us thoroughly understand what was the exact state, at the moment of his conversion, of what we no longer dare to call Durtal's *soul*. Twenty years of married life have told upon him, making him dull and languid, without desires or hopes. The excitement of sowing his wild oats being a thing of the past with him, there is an interest the less in his life. But now he finds himself obliged to recall the sins of his youth, if only for the sake of accusing himself and repenting of them, and behold, he discovers this to be a pleasure — one mixed with horror to be sure, but a pleasure all the same! Then a phenomenon takes place within him that ought to cause him no surprise. He finds his old evil instincts reviving; never has he been so assailed by temptation as since his conversion. Even in the sanctuary the demon inspires him with ignoble thoughts of which he is afterwards ashamed. "He floats like a waif between sin and the church, until he is driven to ask himself if he is not the victim of a mystification of his lower instincts, stirred up without his volition by the stimulus of a false piety." After long hesitation, he decides to go into retreat at La Trappe. The first night he passes in that asylum of peace is marked by such frightful assaults of the Tempter that he has

never experienced the like before. He goes to confession, he steeps himself more and more in the atmosphere of piety that surrounds him — and behold, one morning he finds himself suddenly impelled to pour forth a torrent of blasphemies against the Virgin. His heart is indeed an abyss of evil which is stirred and set in motion by pious thoughts. Such, with Durtal, is the mechanism of conversion; and we begin to see clearly into his case.

At the moment of quitting La Trappe, M. Huysmans' hero bewails his sad fate: —

“I am done for forever!” he exclaims; for when one is conversing with one's self, of what use is it to employ the conventions of the noble style? “I am doomed to live an incomplete being, too much a man-of-letters to become a monk, and yet too much of a monk to remain a man-of-letters.”

A man-of-letters, however, is what he has never ceased to be, and that after the fashion of the Goncourts, who define literature as a “state of violence.” That which he is in search of at the very moment when he is murmuring the name of the Lord, is a new and strange and rare sensation. While he is going through his pious exercises, he is asking himself whether he has felt that inward commotion he was expecting. The Confessional was a drama which fulfilled all he had anticipated from it; but the Communion disappointed him,

he had looked for something greater. The malady of scruples, well-known to converts, brings him appreciable delights; then comes that aridity of soul, that despair of the sinner who feels himself abandoned; finally the pangs of a moral agony which torture him deliciously. This is precisely what had drawn him to the cloister; easy devotion did not tempt him. What is piety worth without its anguish, or faith without its ecstasies? He leaves to less fastidious souls a merely practical Catholicism, with its gentleness and beneficence. He turns directly to mysticism and the perilous doctrines of an overstrained Christianity. For there is no doubt that among the joys which it has been given to man to know, those of the ascetic and the saint surpass all the rest. Might there not be some means of producing in ourselves similar emotions, and of evoking before our dilettante souls such artificial paradises? Is it impossible to carry the tension of the brain and nerves to this point? Here Durtal overtakes Huysmans' Sybarite hero, Des Esseintes — or rather they are one man with similar fancies directed to different ends. It is characteristic of diseased nerves to wear quickly and to be of a changeable humor. Thus Des Esseintes soon discovers that incrusting the shell of a tortoise with jewels, is after all but a tame invention, and the day comes when the style of Commodien of Gaza loses its attractions for

him. But the secret sympathy which unites him with the eccentrics of all ages makes him next choose as a hero in history Gilles de Rais, the original Bluebeard, whose biography he attempts to relate. At the same time, he frequents the modern representatives of devil-worship; he assists at the Black Mass. But the heirs of Cagliostro and Nicolas Flamel are too degenerate, and their melancholy parodies soon pall upon him. His excursion into the supernatural will not have been without value to him, however; for, as he justly remarks, "In the hereafter everything meets." From the sorcerer Flamel he passes, by an almost insensible transition, to the mystic Ruysbroeck. After the biography of Gilles de Rais he attacks that of the blessed Ludwinne, with precisely identical sentiments, and driven by the same sort of curiosity. He finds in Christianity a wonder-working side which enchants him. Dominic of Mary-Jesus, the blessed Gerardesca of Pisa, St. Joseph of Cupertino, and others were accorded the privilege of bodily flight through the air. St. Catherine of Siena, and Angelo of Foligno sustained life for years on no other food than that partaken of in the Sacrament. These things are contrary to the laws of nature; nothing more is wanted to charm this whimsical spirit. Another well-known fact is that the saints scatter powerful perfumes about them.

“St. François de Paul and Venturini of Bergamo embalmed the air while celebrating the Mass; St. Joseph of Cupertino could be tracked by the fragrance he shed about him.” The sense of smell had always acted powerfully upon Des Esseintes’ nerves; thus all the tendencies of his nature led him toward the extravagances of an ultra-Christianity. The Hermit of Fontenoy needed but one more rare and misshapen plant to add to those he was in the habit of collecting at his country-seat; and this was the flower of mysticism, the most fantastic orchid of them all.

We are now fully informed as to the crisis of soul through which M. Huysmans’ hero had passed. Is it necessary to insist that Christianity has nothing whatever to do with the matter? It goes without saying; nevertheless, we are not sorry to point out the real doctrine under the glosses of its various commentators. What is lacking for Durtal’s conversion is, first, his wishing to be converted. In such high matters a few vague aspirations and homesick longings count for nothing.

The author of the “Treatise on the Love of God,” whom the author of “En Route” holds in slight esteem, characterizes these feeble longings admirably: “There is a certain will that is no will, that would, and would not—a sterile will that brings forth no genuine fruit—a paralytic

will that sees the healing pool of sacred love, but lacks strength to cast itself in—a will, in short, which is but an abortion of the truly good will.”

What is wanting to Durtal's conversion, in the second place, is any one of the sentiments that go to make a Christian. The “Imitation” teaches us that “Man raises himself above the earth by two wings, purity and simplicity.” Now, Durtal knows that he has no real purity of heart; and, if he flatters himself that he has simplicity of mind, he is entirely deceived. He looks, indeed, with envy at the humble lay-brother Simeon, who keeps the convent swine, and lives among his animals in perfect familiarity, hardly their superior in intellect.

Ah, to make his own soul resemble that child-like soul, to exchange his artistic reveries for the divine intoxication of a swineherd of La Trappe! There is no one, artist or writer, who has not, at some moment, formed such a wish; but we are none of us duped by it, and we all admit to ourselves how much literature there is in this disdain for literary things. It is a gratification of his pride which Durtal experiences in retiring to La Trappe. At the moment of leaving Paris he looks about the station, at the people as they pass him in the waiting-room, and compares himself with this throng of travellers absorbed in their business or their pleasures. He is highly

pleased with himself for having preoccupations to which they are utterly strangers. He feels himself their superior, and is conscious of doing something eminently distinguished. He reflects that those are the rare beings who have any care for their souls; and he applauds himself for being of the small number of the elect.

Again, Christianity is charity and love for one's neighbor. But who talks to Durtal of loving his neighbor? Durtal's neighbor, the "Cad" to call him by his name, inspires him merely with contempt and aversion; it is precisely in order to forget him, and escape from his odious contact, that Durtal is seeking refuge in the woods that border the quiet park of Notre-Dame de L'Atre.

Christianity signifies abnegation, renunciation, the dying to oneself. But it is for himself, and himself only, that this very unevangelical neophyte cares. He is attentive only to his own emotions; and all the labor he has bestowed upon his conscience has been for the purpose of *finding* himself, and entering into full possession of his being; for he was dispersing himself too much by living in the world. He was divided among many cares, of which he was not himself the sole object.

Henceforth nothing can come to distract him, and he can taste at his leisure the delights of

égoistic contemplation. In fact, what led Durtal toward religion was a mirage of personal happiness. "Ah, how happy they are!" he exclaims, while gazing on his brothers, the recluses. He asks from Christianity the immediate satisfaction of that instinct for happiness which Nature has planted in each of us. But that in itself is the reverse of the Christian idea. The revolution which Christianity has wrought in the moral world consists precisely in this: that it has displaced our ideal, transporting beyond this life the object of life itself, and reserving, for a future Paradise, the realization of dreams which cannot be satisfied here below. It is elsewhere that our destiny must be accomplished. To demand from faith present happiness and earthly felicity is to misunderstand its principle.

Decidedly Durtal is a poor theologian; but it would be puerile to insist further. Moreover, we must admit that if Durtal's Christianity is contrary to the traditions of the Church, it is in conformity with a time-honored literary tradition. It is not an affair of yesterday to confound religion with matters quite alien to it; and I fear that it is only necessary to go back to Châteaubriand to trace the origin of this confusion of rival powers. In any case, Sainte-Beuve in his novel of "Volupté" gives a complete example of it. His Amaury is a Durtal who does not

stop half-way; the study of seminary-life takes the place of the description of La Trappe, and the writings of M. Hamon do duty for those of the admirable Ruysbroeck. Since then, certain writers have made a specialty of this blending of Religion with the World and the Flesh. There is, first, that amazing Barbey D'Aurevilly, a great confessor of the faith, a scorner of lukewarm churchmen, a judge without pity, a combatant without mercy, the herald of an uncompromising Catholicism, who, in order to sustain the orthodox doctrine, and to prop up Christian morality, writes the "Diaboliques" and the "Prêtre Marié," to the scandal of even lay propriety.

There is Baudelaire, whose greatest originality consists in having given expression to a fleshly mysticism; and the melting author of "Sagesse," what has he done but vibrate between alternatives of contrition and relapse, cursing in advance the sins he is about to commit; tasting through repentance the sins already committed, and finding repose only in a final impenitence? To enumerate to-day all the representatives of this decadent Christianity, of which M. Huysmans has given us so fine and penetrating an analysis, it suffices to pass in review the new literary cliques, and pick out some of the most distinguished names; to skim their books, and

point out their especial literary idols in the past. They are all respectful toward the bard of St.-Sauveur-le-Vicomte, fervent toward the poet of *Fleurs du Mal*, and not less enthusiastic over the misunderstood genius of Count Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. The latter's poem of "Axel" opens with the ceremony of taking the veil; and it is this poem which a blundering piety has lately brought out upon the stage. It now appears that "the author had judged his work to be not sufficiently orthodox, and had planned to introduce the Cross into the final act of his drama;" Villiers de l'Isle-Adam it was, who laid claim to the grand mastership of the Knights of Malta; and now M. J. Péladan has restored, for his own benefit, the order of the Rosicrucians. Then we have M. le Comte Robert de Montesquieu, who adorns his horticultural catalogues with nosegays of mysticism; M. Georges Rodenbach, who celebrates nunneries, and sings the white coifs of the nuns flying through the air, like wings of snowy linen; and M. Francis Poictevin, a gentle visionary, whose candor arouses sympathy, and whose obstinacy commands respect; who publishes fantastic booklets yearly, in which he stammers forth strange and incoherent mysteries. Finally, the dramatists of "L'Œuvre" have formed a partnership to found together a "Theatre of the Hereafter." There are others whom I forget, and

I voluntarily omit the still larger number for whom mysticism is merely a form of sensationalism.

A revival of mystical literature is the current topic of the day. Naturalism having perished by its own excesses, and positivism having seen its best days, the soul is about to recover its titles, the supernatural is to come into its own again; in short, the sense of mystery has been restored to us, and the partisans of the ideal rejoice! Again, as at the dawn of romanticism, all the literary brotherhoods are Catholic; the believers congratulate themselves upon this return to their ideas, and prepare to receive the converted sinners with open arms. But a true attachment to the doctrines of the church inspires a distrust of such counterfeits and parodies as these. The modern confusion of language is so great that much misunderstanding ensues; it is therefore of interest to try and clear up the subject of the literary Catholicism of the day, and M. Huysmans' book has come just in time to aid us.

Many elements have contributed to the formation of this neo-Catholicism; many sentiments unite in it, but one is lacking, and that is *Christian* sentiment. As far as that is concerned, we search in vain for even a shadow of it. On the other hand, what we can distinguish, in this misty ideal, is a weariness of life, a contempt for the present time

and regret for a time long past, dimly discerned through the illusions of art, and with these a taste for paradox, an affectation of singularity, a longing for simplicity on the part of the over sophisticated, a childish adoration for the marvellous, the morbid charm of day-dreams, and finally a general nervous excitement and the appeal of the senses.

This is, in truth, what lies hidden beneath the depths of this pretended mysticism. The return to a false devotion occurs simultaneously with a general distrust and despair of love. This is significant. The decline of faith coincides with the lessening joy of existence. Therefore the one must be regained to save the other. This nostalgia of Christianity is the regret for a lost chimera of happiness. This aspiration toward piety is the effort of a weary generation to restore to their souls that faith without which even sin itself will have lost its savor.





M. RENÉ BAZIN.





M. RENÉ BAZIN.

AFTER reading certain novels of the present day, we are tempted to say to ourselves, "How narrow the field of literature is, after all! The difference between one book and another is merely one of style, and not always that! As for the characters our novelists bring upon the scene, their study of manners, their analysis of sentiment, it is a constant repetition. We are always in the same world, — a world situated, it appears, in a corner of Paris, and peopled exclusively by the rich and idle, the elegant and depraved, — a world so small that it can all be held in a salon, — almost upon a sofa just vacated by the doctrinaires of yesterday. By close observation of this world we discover how rapidly the human plant decomposes in a special atmosphere and under the influence of a certain leaven, and we are able to study the action of the bacillæ of corruption. For my part I have never known any one who bore the least resemblance to the characters in these novels, for I choose my acquaintances better. The souls of these people are

absolutely strange to me. I accept what is told me about them, as I should accept the narrative of an explorer in remote zones, — from inability to go and verify it. But try as I may, I cannot feel within myself a germ of their perversities, and their elegancies strike me as most unlovely. Apparently I and my fellows are not novel-characters. There is a book-humanity distinguishable by its unlikeness to general humanity. Literature is a state of violence; decent people are not interesting, and healthy people are of no value from an artistic point of view; it is only eccentricity and disease that count." . . .

Thus we reflect within ourselves; but we take good care not to utter our reflections aloud, as we do not wish to appear too *naïf*. We are fain to content ourselves with dreaming of books, which with no less literary merit than these, have less of a special sort of interest, and which, without seeking to palliate human misery, contrive not to leave behind them an impression of disgust and a mouldy smell of bad literature. This explains the value we attach to the works of M. René Bazin; we like him for the delicacy of soul and elevation of feeling shown in his books, and for his courage in remaining a pure and decent writer, while he is, at the same time, a truthful and clear-sighted one; and we are grateful to him, besides, for having a great deal of talent.



RENÉ BAZIN.



M. René Bazin will not take it ill, if I venture to attribute a large share of what is best in him to the circle in which he has lived, the education he has received, and the impressions that have come to him from without.

Those of us who had not the good fortune to be born in the country, are forever cut off from an entire order of pleasures and emotions. The true charm of nature must remain a dead letter to us. It may exist as a conception of the mind, but we cannot feel its influence working in the depths of our soul; we can never know the secrets nature reveals to those who are early initiated into her language.

When, some day, a sudden lassitude and disgust with ourselves drives us to seek from green fields a little rest of body and refreshment of mind, we become that most ridiculous of beings, a ruralizing cockney.

The great writers of this century who have best revealed nature to us are those who learned to know her early in life, — Châteaubriand and Jean Jacques. Lamartine had listened to the harvesters' voices borne upon the air at nightfall, and had followed home their heavily laden wains. George Sand had roamed the fields of her native Berry, and listened to the hemp-weavers' tales in the twilight.

In those youthful days the mind is fresh and

docile, not yet so absorbed in itself as to be insensible to the sights that surround it; and its youth thus blending with the youth of all things its impressions take all the sweetness and charm that come with awakening life. It is the season of day-dreams, the age when a perfume of poetry penetrates the being, which later is utterly dispelled. But we, who are the children of cities have never learned to ramble and dream, we can scarcely be said to have had a childhood.

M. René Bazin's first years flowed peacefully by in the country adjoining Segré. I imagine that, being of a delicate constitution, his native soil and air were thought necessary to his health and he was therefore allowed to roam freely in the woods and fields. Thus he followed untrodden paths day after day, with no guide but his fancy; the events of his life were the stir of the sap in the growing plants and under the forest boughs. "Our first great news," he writes, "is that the willow buds have burst open; all the way up the branches, the *luisettes* are gleaming, — a name that so well describes the silvery tints of the young leaves, — and little catkins and downy tufts are clinging to them."

He knows the season of the year by the way the earth decks herself: "The water-ranunculus having blossomed, while the cuckoo-buds are still to come." Alas for us, who scarcely know what

a water-ranunculus is like, or what a cuckoo-bud may be!

He can distinguish the hour of day by the sounds that come to him across the fields: "Many sounds are blended in one, — the crowing of cocks in the farmyards, the whistle of blackbirds from the ditches, the roll of heavy carts, the yelping of dogs just let loose, voices from the houses calling belated men, and a distant footfall soon lost in the soft grass."

He knows the time of year when birds of passage are driven home by the cold, and he lies awake at night to listen for their coming. In his rambles here and there he forms human ties. He has acquaintances in all the farmhouses and peasants' cottages; he makes friends among the rustic Bohemians, the band of irregulars which includes rat-catchers, bear-leaders, poachers on land and poachers on the water, mole-catchers who are half sorcerers, all who follow those professions with which good Christians do not meddle. These folk are brought by the mysteries of their calling into the sphere of the legendary. They are witnesses of uncanny sights. "At the twilight hour, in valleys through which a river flows, when the last gleams are dying in the west, have you never heard the sound of women beating their clothes under the alders? *You* have passed quickly by; but those others have gone to see,

and have recognized in the shadow the accursed washerwoman, — the maid who strangled her child, and who, every evening, washes the swaddling-clothes that will never be worn. Is she living or dead? Who knows? She beats her clothes, and her company is evil.”

Evil, too, is the apparition of the water-damsels, who rise from ponds, swathed in robes of mist. And those who frequent this world of fantastic appearances are to be dreaded too, and yet we feel drawn to them in spite of ourselves. We listen to their strange tales of the sights they have seen, till, little by little, we divine how behind the apparent shapes of things there lurks the unknown, a mystery for which, at certain hours, we watch shuddering. It is thus that his native soil, by its emotions, by its sights, by its very atmosphere, formed the sensibility of the future writer, and implanted in his heart the Angevine gentleness.

M. René Bazin has remained faithful to his province. He lives in the attractive city of Angers. When he leaves it, it is for a little tour through France, or a rare journey, — once to Sicily and once to Spain. He is seldom to be met with on the Parisian boulevards. Not that he has any prejudice against Paris, or fails to appreciate the tone of our society or the quality of our diversions, but he is conscious that he has noth-

ing to gain from a residence among us, but on the contrary, would run a risk of losing his originality and the savor of his talent.

We mock at so many things, through not understanding them or knowing how to enjoy them! Provincial life doubtless has its foibles too. I will merely remark that we should be the last to dwell upon some of the weaknesses with which we are in the habit of reproaching provincials. It appears that the dwellers in small cities are a little too much occupied with the affairs of their neighbors; but that is just where these small cities most nearly resemble our great city. Can it be that those who complain of provincial gossip have never set foot in a Paris salon? We also reproach the provincial mind with its narrowness. Is it possible that we can deceive ourselves as to the real character of the Parisian mind? It is here that prejudice reigns supreme; it is here that we accept ideas ready made for us — made we know not how, but we know too well by whom; it is here that men and things are judged from our special point of view, according to an arbitrary and shifting morality, which is not current anywhere outside the fortifications, or even beyond the Madeleine. To have escaped from this tyranny is the great advantage a writer enjoys who lives in the provinces.

How dangerous also is the life peculiar to the

Parisian man of letters. He is forever haunted by the proximity of a possible rival; he hears too close at hand the noise of his own successes, and is thus insensibly led to sacrifice everything to them, reducing himself to the *rôle* of a mere amuser. Thus he becomes the dupe of his profession.

Outside of this peculiar atmosphere and these factitious surroundings, a writer is better situated to judge of many things; he is sheltered from our infatuations; he is not dependent on our literary fashions, or a slave to the opinions of others. He belongs to himself; he can take his own tastes into account, follow his natural bent, and cherish his illusions and dreams.

Literary life does not become a mirage obscuring his vision of real life. Before being an author, he is a man, with a house which is all his own, a family attached to the country, with roots in the soil, not like those Arab tents which a sudden success causes to spring up among us in a night, out of we know not what shady origin. This is a guaranty of the dignity of the work as well as of the writer, and a safeguard against many extravagances. Finally, provincial life is that led by the majority of men in France, and outside of France. Therefore we fail to see why literature should limit her own horizon by occupying herself only with an exceptional class, which may not be even an *élite*.

I will not go so far as to say that in order to be worthy of holding a pen one must be born in a village like Pézenas, or that life can afford no real interest outside the precincts of the hamlet of Landerneau; but if we wish to know what resources the provinces have to offer to a writer who loves them, we have only to look through the series of articles which M. René Bazin has published in the *Journal des Débats* under the title "En Province," and which are among the most charming productions we owe to the journalism of the day. Landscapes, studies of manners, recollections, reveries, legends, anecdotes, little dramas, all these different elements are blended in the freest and most natural fashion, giving a vivid impression of things directly seen.

"I will come back once more to the fields, the woods, and suburban scenes. I will tell you what the face of awakening spring is like this year, or I will carry you off to Normandy, among the grassy meadows, where the good folk are already beginning to count their stacks of hay, or I will relate to you how my friend, old Michael, was found dead at the foot of a tree he was pruning, the last day of the great frosts." All the western provinces of France — Brittany, Anjou, the Vendée, the Landes, and even as far south as the Basque country — M. René Bazin has explored in all seasons and at all hours; he has seized upon their every

aspect, and is never weary of noting and reproducing them. There are many little towns, such as Vitré, Fougères, Béziers, which are seldom named in books, and hold no great state in the world; but M. Bazin well knows that there is not one of them which has not a physiognomy of its own, for him who knows how to catch it, and a special charm for all who are willing to lend themselves to its spell.

First he looks at them from a distance, and marks how their silhouette is drawn against a background of hills or upon an horizon of plains; next he enters, and walks around the ancient ramparts and through the modern squares; he informs himself in regard to the people who live there, and their manner of living; he makes inquiries as to the local industries, and the efforts they are forced to make to compete with greater rivals and keep up with the progress of the times.

It is not the most picturesque sites which tempt M. Bazin's pencil, and he does not reserve his admiration for stereotyped beauties. I might almost say that he does not select, but follows with equal curiosity every aspect of a landscape, every slope of the land and diversity of soil. For, as he somewhere remarks, beauty disengages itself slowly from the heart of things, if only we look at them with patience and love.

This love for the things he describes is what

gives their peculiar character to the pictures M. Bazin draws; it reveals itself not so much in an emotional style as in minuteness and precision of detail. A lover knows every feature and every expression of the face he loves. And so the outline of her cities, the changing tints of her sky, the color of her air and light, all these make up the face of France.

The face of a country changes like that of a person. Thus we see in old cities certain very ancient quarters — tortuous streets wind through them, grass grows up between the pavements, and heavy shadows are cast by the over-hanging roofs. The houses are crowded close together and lean upon each other; there are stately and humble ones, some with a gloomy, forbidding aspect, others as smiling and cordial in their old age as some good old grandmother. They differ from each other as much as human beings do. They speak to us of the epoch at which they were built, and the character of those who dwelt in them. They know many a history of the olden time, and preserve the traditions of the past in order to reveal them to a new generation. Some day you find yourself in such a storied spot, and feel as if you were transported into another era; but let a few years pass, and the zeal of a municipality eager for improvements be let loose upon it, and behold! the capricious network of old streets will

have given place to straight new avenues without individuality, lined with brand-new houses that have never suffered, and consequently have no soul. . . . Some day, not long ago, you may have sailed up the Loire, and found the same stream you knew of old, bordered by the same poplars — and yet you are conscious that something is wanting to the scene. What has become of the great square sails you used to see gleaming white in the distance? Ask shipmaster Houlyer, who has been a hardy mariner in his day. He will tell you that the navigation of rivers is over, that the days of adventurous voyages, when the river offered as many perils as the sea, are past. Thus everything passes away, and the grandsons let the customs of their fathers fall into disuse one by one. The fields are no longer cultivated in the old way, and ideas have ceased to germinate after the old fashion. In casting aside the ancient costumes men have also abandoned the soul of the past. But these far-away things have an intimate poetry of their own, and a melancholy charm attaches to all that is about to perish. It is therefore a sort of piety on the part of a writer to try and fix the image of the past, as it is about to disappear, leaving behind it only the aroma he may catch, in the pages he dedicates to these memories.

Far too much importance has been attached to questions of race, and the influence of surround-

ings has been greatly exaggerated. Nevertheless, we are right "in associating, in a certain measure, the humors of men, the color of their eyes, the quality of their minds above all, not only with the race from which they have sprung, but with the soil they inhabit and the air they breathe. . . ."

M. Bazin takes pleasure in noting these diversities of type, and in observing the different imprints stamped on individuals by their profession or condition in life. Thus he shows us the peasant and the functionary, the tax-collector and the doctor, the great lady who has met with reverses, and the shop-woman enriched by prodigies of labor and miracles of economy, all in their true light, with the attitude, gesture, and accent proper to them. And, since in provincial life there is no existence so hidden that its mystery cannot be penetrated, it is only necessary to lend an attentive ear to the narratives of the well informed. The tales thus told to M. Bazin, he relates in turn to us; he takes pride in inventing nothing, but endeavors to be merely a faithful echo.

We all know, however, that it matters little what is told; the whole value of a tale is in the telling; thus these village reminiscences are turned by M. Bazin into genuine little romances.

"*La Demoiselle*," for instance, is the story of a timid, neglected old maid, who, having come into an unexpected inheritance, is seized with a mania for

building; and proceeds to restore an old *château*, not in order to live in it herself, but merely that she may occupy, from time to time, a nook at the fireside, leaving to those younger than herself the enjoyment of the sumptuous dwelling she has prepared for them.

“*La Servante*” is a story of devoted loyalty, such as is generally believed to be the invention of reporters for the Montyon prize of virtue.

“*Le Cygne*” is the narrative of a night of anguish passed at the bedside of a sick child by two men who were foes the day before, but whom the spectacle of this suffering reconciles to each other. These stories are valuable for their picturesqueness of detail, for the firm touch with which the actors are sketched in, and for the emotion betrayed by the narrator. All that is needed to turn them into genuine novels is to enlarge the setting. We perceive in them that, with M. Bazin, it is the provincial who constitutes the novelist.

M. Bazin brings to the novel two qualities which are becoming so rare among us, that a passing allusion to them does not suffice. One is tenderness. It is not that there is any lack of objects of commiseration in the books of to-day. Pity and charity have been restored to fashion, but in point of fact they have become a mere literary fad; they are compromised in many strange adventures, and the least worthy characters are those who benefit

the most by them. This has been carried so far, that the boundless indulgence extended to rascaldom has become an insult and almost a reproach to decent people.

Besides, these effusions of sensibility are perfectly compatible with hardness of heart; for, in truth, the heart has nothing whatever to do with them.

It is quite otherwise with M. Bazin. Tenderness with him is neither an affair of fashion, nor an imported Russian article; neither is it the conclusion of a process of philosophical reasoning, a sort of reversed Pessimism. It is his natural disposition; and he is naturally drawn toward those who suffer with dignity and without complaint; he turns away from the proud and violent. He is in sympathy with those who live by the affections; he loves sad souls, and is closely bound to all the resigned and self-sacrificing.

It is a strange necessity that obliges us nowadays to define in what tenderness consists, and to explain that, in attributing this quality to an author, we do not intend it as a reproach!

I fear I shall have still more difficulty in making myself understood, and shall astonish many people yet more, by venturing to assert that another merit in a writer is elevation of mind.

This is a notion we have quite lost sight of since the advent of "brutal literature." Ever since

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that time coarseness has come to be considered a sign of strength, and triviality a synonym for daring.

This confusion is far from being dissipated as yet; those who have an interest in maintaining it are too numerous. There is a competition going on among novelists as to who shall discover the most repugnant aspects of human nature and society. It is a new sport; they are trying to beat the record!

Thus, little by little, our ideas are being falsified, our taste spoilt, our sensibilities stifled. Apart from the painting of vice, all seems colorless and insipid.

Certainly we would not recommend our writers to present an embellished and consequently a lying picture of reality. Nor would we counsel them to yield to illusions and a dangerous optimism. We know only too well that evil is inherent in human nature, and that sorrow is the stuff of which life is made. We ignore nothing of our shortcomings and miseries.

But, on the other hand, we do not admit that literature was specially invented in order to remind us of the reasons we have for despising ourselves. We believe that the treatment of certain subjects involves no profit and some shame; and that there are dregs rather than depths of human nature into which we may decline to be dragged.

We would select, in our interpretation of life, sights that can be endured, sentiments that may be avowed, and situations in which man does not sink below himself. But I perceive that I am in a fair way to prejudice the cause of my novelist!

M. Bazin's novels are far from being all of equal merit. He has written some which are not precisely bad, but come perilously near mediocrity. I am not alluding to "Stephanette," a first book, which the author can hardly be said to have published — I am not sure it was even for sale, and I mention it merely by way of displaying my erudition. It relates how a noble married the daughter of a curiosity-dealer, how said curiosity-dealer had been one of the most atrocious executioners of the Revolution, and how his daughter, who was not his daughter, was really the nobleman's cousin — all this can be read without much fatigue, and is no more tiresome than many other things. But these stories, borrowed from Revolutionary annals, have had their day in the history of literature. "Une Tache d'Encre," a work crowned by the Academy, seems to me, in spite of its crown, to be a regrettable production. M. Bazin adopts in it a tone of innocent playfulness, and a sort of harmless humor. Here and elsewhere he relates, with too much complacency, the adventures of the good young man who ends by wedding the ideal heiress. This is the tone of certain novels of

Sandeau, which had their charm some fifty years ago; provincial taste is not so changeable as ours, and fashions that are a little gone by with us still please in the Departments. "Ma Tante Giron," "Les Noellets," "Madame Corentine," "La Sarcelle Bleue," — these are the books in which we can best appreciate M. Bazin's manner.

This "Sarcelle Bleue" is one of the prettiest stories that has appeared for years. The author has here found an opportunity to display all his qualities of grace, emotion, and discretion. The situation described is one of extreme delicacy, — one of those false situations which can be entered upon without guile, where the heart becomes engaged in spite of itself and almost unawares. A godfather lives under the same roof with his god-daughter, and, little by little, the half-paternal affection he has felt for the child, growing up under his eyes, develops into love. The analysis of a similar crisis of feeling has tempted more than one of our contemporaries, and in our day the despair of Arnolphe has ceased to be ridiculous.

I could cite a dozen novels on the same theme; but nowhere is it treated with so light a touch, or with such a gift for suggesting more than is told. It is one of M. Bazin's merits to discern the significant trait, to touch on the point that reveals a whole inner world of thought and feeling, and to avoid undue emphasis. He has taste; and in this

he shows himself a true artist, as also in the way he harmonizes his tints, and keeps a narrative all in the same tone.

The landscape, the home scenes, the conversations, everything in the "Sarcelle Bleue," has the same freshness of tint, the transparency of a water-color. We might call it, in fact, the water-color sketch of a master.

In "Madame Corentin," as well as in the "Sarcelle Bleue," and in nearly all of his books, M. Bazin introduces young girls. They are young girls such as are still to be found in France, who do not ride the bicycle, and have not studied anatomy. They have the charm which their more modern sisters are doing their best to lose, and which came from a sheltered education. They are, however, far from resembling a stage *Ingénue*. They have a will of their own, and can even show obstinacy in a good cause. They fill an important place at home without appearing to do so, and exert a great deal of influence without making it consciously felt. This is what makes them so lovable, and at the same time so true to life.

It is in pictures of the family and of home life that M. Bazin chiefly excels. We can never forget, after entering it with him, that house of the "Pépinières" in "La Sarcelle Bleue." The days flow by there in drowsy regularity, broken by no incident beyond the adding of a new chapter to

the father's "Treatise on Ornithology," or a new row of stitches to the ladies' worsted work. And the years pass by, one like another, bringing nothing into these uniform lives but a silent drama of the heart, that remains forever unguessed.

These dwellers at the Pépinières belong to the well-to-do provincial bourgeoisie. The personages in "Madame Corentin" are small tradespeople, careful of their gains, in whose lives the question of money mingles necessarily with questions of sentiment.

In "Les Noellet" we are among the peasantry: and I am not sure that scenes of rural life have ever been more faithfully reproduced than in the first chapters of this story, where we are introduced to a family of small farmers. Père Noellet knows and loves nothing but the land, and it is for this life he is bringing up his sons. But, as so often happens, Pierre Noellet, the eldest son, despises the family calling; he has a taste for learning, he is proud and intelligent, and he finally induces his parents to send him to the seminary, to study for the church. It costs many sacrifices to do this; but the old people accept them bravely, feeling it to be only just that a child should follow his vocation, and believing that no one has the right to withhold from God those whom he has chosen and called to his service. But lo! one fine day Pierre declares that he will not be a

priest; that he has no vocation, but has lied and deceived his parents in order to force them to give him an education above his class, and that he wishes to go to Paris and become a gentleman. This drama of peasant life is related with remarkable intensity; each of the actors is consistently drawn; and every touch shows patient observation and an intimate acquaintance with the people and the life herein depicted. We are equally far from idyl and from caricature; we are in full reality.

Such is the final form assumed by M. René Bazin's talent. In proportion as he leaves behind him the conventional romanticism from which he set out, he inclines toward a realism whose tone, at once frank and true, and at the same time full of distinction, is a new tone in our literature.

His fine story of "Donatienne" is a case in point. It is founded on an incident as simple and commonplace as a newspaper item.

Poverty is becoming more threatening each day in the home of the gardener Jean Louarn, until at last he resigns himself to letting his wife, Donatienne, go up to Paris and take a situation as nurse. As for him, he assumes the care of the children, and waits at home. He waits, in obstinate faith, for Donatienne's letters, which come at longer and longer intervals, and for the money she is to send, which never comes at all. Finally

the poor gardener is ejected from his home, without bread to eat, and learns from village gossip the whole extent of his misfortune. Donatienne is not coming back to him; she will never come back; she is too much afraid of poverty. She has quickly forgotten her home and people, and acquired a taste for an easy life, good food, and frequent merry-makings. . . .

Within the limits of this short story M. Bazin has found means to make us understand or divine everything, — the opposition of nature between Jean Louarn and his wife; the sort of obscure longing that drives Donatienne toward the city; the demoralizing examples she meets with, even before her arrival there; the atmosphere of corruption to which she first yields, and which she finally learns to enjoy. In the same way, we easily foresee the future in store for Jean Louarn, who must gradually sink into the ranks of the unemployed. But imagine the same subject treated by a naturalist, and ask yourself what he would have made of it. Indeed, we are not reduced to hypotheses; we can all recall such a treatment of the theme; and we have only to re-read a few pages of "Pot-Bouille" or "L'Assommoir." It is on the figure of Donatienne the whole attention would have been concentrated; we should have been spared no detail of her successive falls, and the little drolleries of her attic would have afforded

matter for most engaging chapters. Great care would have been taken not to leave the nurse's husband on the brink of the abyss into which he must inevitably sink ; and, under the pretext of instructing us, we should have been shown how surely vice is the result of poverty, and should have had pointed out to us, with minute complacency, the progressive demoralization of these two beings. But M. Bazin reverses this method. He has relegated the figure of Donatienne to the background, and has brought our interest to bear on the only character worthy of it, the husband. He has chosen the interesting period of his destiny, that in which he is struggling in the toils of approaching calamity, while he is still making a brave effort to keep his manhood intact.

Such is the realism of which we have had, for a long time, only a grotesque and odious parody ; and this has been carried so far that we have come to regard with disgust the very notion of reality in art.

Whenever these representations of a false realism have tried to draw workingmen, peasants, "the humble," in short, they have shown that they were mere literary men transported into a world quite strange to them. They have drawn these classes without understanding them — above all, without loving them. They have been attracted toward them not by a sympathetic impulse, but by one of

hostile curiosity. Misanthropes themselves, they have discovered a means of offering to humanity the most degraded image of herself. This realism is based on hatred.

And yet it is a literary system which can flourish only upon love. It is one where the author should efface himself, renounce and forget his personality, to enter into the souls of those whose condition in life, whose sufferings and hopes, all separate them from ourselves. He should repudiate here the point of view of the mere artist, concerned with effects enamoured of what is exceptional and rare.

The example of the Russian and the English novelists has come opportunely to recall this to us. It is, therefore, interesting to see, at this time, one of our own writers, who, without joining their school, but simply by finding himself in an analogous state of feeling, has returned to the conception of a serious and thoroughly human realism. It is in this direction that M. Bazin seems to be called upon to direct his efforts and develop his originality.

We must at least refer to one more feature of M. Bazin's work. He has written charming narratives of travel. We will not say that he has revived the mode, — the expression would be too ambitious and calculated to alarm his modesty, — but he has certainly adapted it to the taste of the day. Journeys in these days are within every-

